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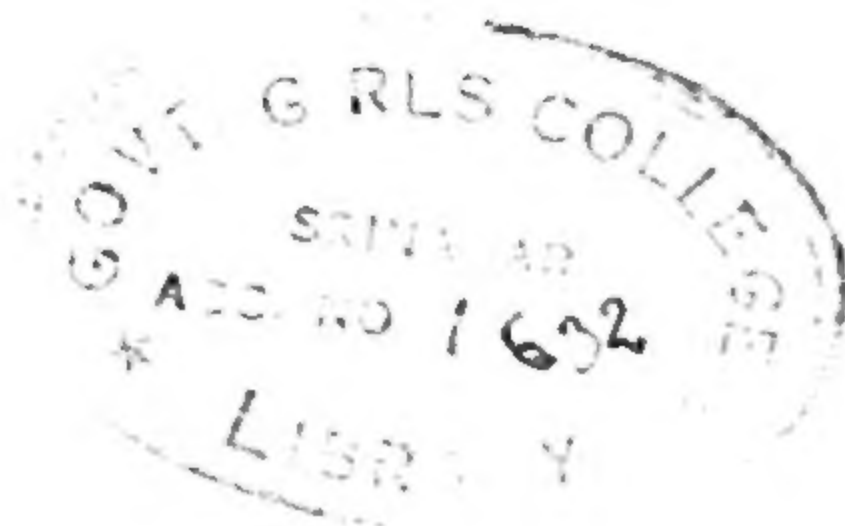




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STANLEY BALDWIN



*By the same Author*

SAMUEL PEPYS

CHARLES II

THE NATIONAL CHARACTER

GEORGE V



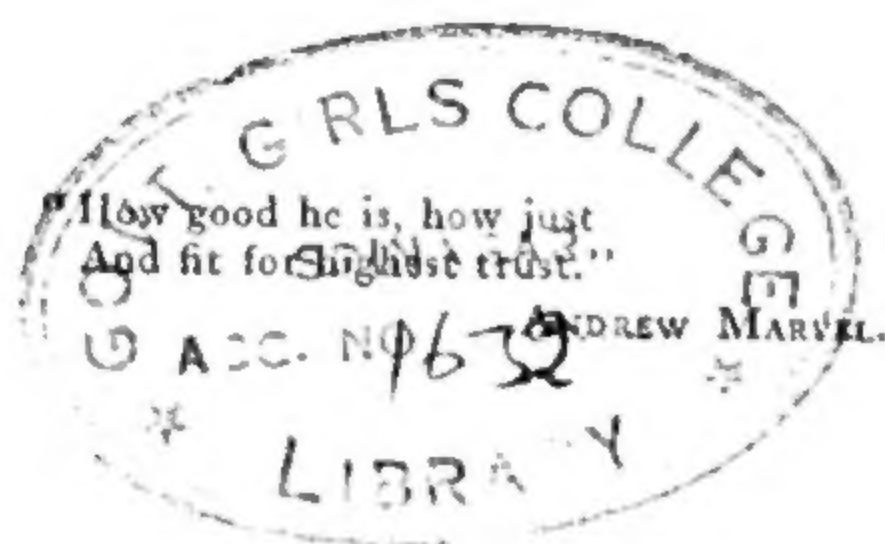


By courtesy

*By courtesy of the British Broadcasting Corporation*

# Stanley Baldwin

*A Tribute by*  
ARTHUR BRYANT



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TO  
JOHN DAVIDSON  
IN  
FAIR AND FOUL WEATHER  
THE FAITHFUL FRIEND  
OF  
THE SUBJECT OF THIS BOOK

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## PREFACE

**T**HIS brief book is written in all humility as a tribute to a great Englishman at the hour of his retirement. It makes no attempt to be authoritative.

The outlines of Mr. Baldwin's career have been very simple. He began it as a local man, fulfilling an hereditary obligation of local service. His first years in Parliament were spent solely in the performance of that duty. His sudden rise to power was in a sense accidental, and not of his seeking. The hour made him, and not he the hour.

In another sense his rise was not accidental. He overthrew the Coalition in 1922, not because he believed in his own abilities, but because as no other man in public life he believed in an ideal which he knew himself qualified to put into practice. It was as obvious as it was necessary : to restore good humour and the spirit of compromise and co-operation to British public life. Without that, nothing of any lasting benefit to the community could be achieved. And without it democracy, which depends on ready agreement following free discussion, could not function.

More than any public man of his generation, Mr. Baldwin has believed in democracy because he has believed in the common man. Like Cromwell and Lincoln, he learnt to know and love him in the long years of provincial life that preceded his appearance on the national stage. From this circumstance, and the profound faith to which it has given rise, his strength is derived.

Strength above all other qualities is his chief attribute. I never met any man who carried so much of it in his bearing: it communicates itself to others.

One of the first times I ever talked with him he had just come from his victory over those who wished to dethrone him in 1930. He looked very tired, but the impression which like most of my countrymen I had formed of him by hearsay—of a sincere, honest, but not very strong man—vanished in a moment. Honesty and sincerity were written all over his face, but there was more. This man was above all things a fighter. There was some spark of divine fire, some hard indomitable grit about him. Here, at that moment, was not the leisured and literary pig-breeder so dear to the illustrated press, but the hard old party “boss” with the light of battle in his eye, making mincemeat of the assailants who had foolishly mistaken patience and forbearance for indolence and timidity. Once, on another occasion, I saw him stand in the gallery at Chequers with Cromwell’s death mask in his hands, and gazing at those two faces I could not say which was the stronger. It is in his strength that I have tried to draw him in these unworthy pages. If I have added the warts too, it is because he wished me to.

Under his strength the man is a poet. He pities and loves his fellow creatures because he understands them. Because of that he has been able to put himself in the place of others even

when he has disagreed with them. The respect in which he is held by the Labour men in the House is proof of this: "He is the greatest man in the country," said one of them a short while ago. There have been times when in non-party questions he has almost seemed to lead Labour from the Treasury Bench.

It has been the same in the country. "You recruit from the Left," somebody once remarked to him. He understands the working man, his aspirations and those of the institutions which he supports, and he has tried consistently to help him. "I'd strike over and over again rather than be driven," he has said on more than one occasion. He has always given his political opponents the credit for good intentions. By doing so he has helped to teach his countrymen to trust one another again.

One thinks of him with gratitude for all this, and one thinks of him for himself. One thinks of the shrewd, kindly, rugged face, with the lines of his courage and patient service written upon it; the deep voice so firm and full of feeling; the quick wit and fun long held in leash yet sometimes flashing forth to delight some companion; the truth, the faith, the selfless humility which is Stanley Baldwin. And like the Bishop of Worcester, remembering all that might have happened in our land but for his life of love and service, one thanks God for him. Yet there is no miracle in his existence: there have been men like Baldwin in England for centuries and will be

again, for the racial mould out of which he came is still there, to make others like him, in the green fields and woods of our misty native land and, perhaps, in the prairies and forests and golden beaches of those new lands to which the British race have gone out. The hour of his country's need called forth the man, that was all; the long years of service did the rest and made him, for the fulfilment of his duty, the man we see him.

It remains for me to thank those who by their personal kindness have made it possible for me to write this book: to Mr. Baldwin himself, to Mr. Windham Baldwin, to Sir John Davidson, Professor G. M. Trevelyan, Sir Geoffrey Fry, Mr. Stanley Hemingway of Bewdley, Mr. F. S. Tooby of Wilden, Sir Patrick Gower, Mr. T. N. Graham, and Mr. Percy Cohen, all of whom have given me the most generous help. There are others whom I should like to thank also but who modestly prefer to remain anonymous. I should add that for what I have written here, I alone am responsible.

My grateful acknowledgments are also due to Messrs. Hodder and Stoughton for permission to quote from *Our Inheritance* and *This Torch of Freedom*, to Messrs. Philip Allen for permission to quote from *Our England*, and to Messrs. Mills and Boon for a passage from the *Conservative Mind* by The Gentleman with a Duster.

ARTHUR BRYANT.

21st May, 1937.

# CONTENTS

| CHAPTER                                   | PAGE |
|---|------|
| I. THE MAN OF BEWDLEY . . . .             | 11   |
| II. THE RISE TO POWER . . . .             | 46   |
| III. THE UNKNOWN PREMIER . . . .          | 86   |
| IV. THE LEADERSHIP OF FAITH AND CHARACTER | 143  |





# STANLEY BALDWIN

## CHAPTER I

### THE MAN OF BEWDLEY

"And the men that were boys when I was a boy  
Walking along with me."

H. BELLOC.

**M**ANY centuries ago the little town of Bewdley in Worcestershire was saved from destruction by the common sense and cunning of one of its inhabitants. The Devil, it is said, travelling incognito, was carrying a spadeful of earth across England in order to dam the Severn and drown the natives of those parts. When almost there he met a Bewdley cobbler of whom he asked the way. But the cobbler, smelling sulphur, put two and two together and, guessing that the stranger was the father of lies and boded no good to his customers, told him that Bewdley was so far that he could never hope to get there: the old shoes in the bag on his back, he explained, had been worn out in trying to reach it. Believing all Worcestershire

men to be honest, the Devil dropped his earth and went home. A small hill called Spittleful, or the Devil's Spadeful, still marks the spot where the incident occurred, and Bewdley stands to this day less changed, perhaps, than any other town in England.

There is certainly no more beautiful spot. The Severn, watering all that fertile land, flows past ancient, comely houses of brick or timber, and in spring every turn of winding road and hill surmounted reveals a valley of white blossom, rising out of red earth. From the upper places of that country-side a wide prospect can be obtained—eastwards into England over the heathlands towards Birmingham and the far Oxfordshire hills, and westwards into Wales, whose mysterious horizon holds the promise of mountains. The subject of these pages has described that panorama as seen on a clear evening, "lying like an opalescent bar of blue against the sky, straight, rigid, like the Apennines seen from the plain of Lombardy, the whole length of the Cotswolds, cut only by Bredon in the middle and by the Malverns at the end." Elsewhere he has spoken of stretches of road, "where every turn opens out a fresh picture to make you draw in your breath with sheer delight, where the roadside timber is yet undisturbed, and where the black-and-white cottage at the bend, with its garden scented with gilly-flowers, makes such an awkward corner for the motorist; and here and there the little inn,

even as it was when Glutton met Peronel of Flanders in the days when Langland lay on the slopes of Malvern Hill. And even now when the cider is growing warm in china mugs on the hob in the inner parlour, some bowman on his long journey home from Agincourt or some pikeman from Naseby would find there the same kindly company, the same broad speech, the same wise, tolerant native humour of that world in which he was born."<sup>1</sup>

"But I dare not," this son of Worcestershire has told us, "linger in the alehouse." For were he to do so, there would be no leaving his compatriots till the last drop of ale or cider had been drunk and the lights put out and the door barred against the night. Like all those who live by the land and dwell in their fathers' houses, the men of Worcestershire are realists and humorists, and being such, are good company to one who is so himself. "Oi am wot Oi am and can't be no 'ammeret," is a saying in those parts. A Worcestershire man, it is also said, cannot be "druv."

Of this land and of these people, in a plain red brick eighteenth-century house in a narrow street in Bewdley on 3rd August, 1867, was born to Louisa, wife of Alfred Baldwin, iron-master, a male child. Later that day he was carried to the top of the house in a blanket by his mother's nurse, who being a Bewdley woman and wanting the newcomer to rise in life, believed that this was the best way of ensuring it: to make doubly

<sup>1</sup> *This Torch of Freedom*, 141-2.

sure she put a chair in the middle of the attic and stood up in it with the child in her arms. Later he was christened Stanley after his great-grandfather, a well-known Methodist minister.

A hundred years before, in the pioneering days of the eighteenth century, a Baldwin had come south from the other side of Clee Hill and, leaving his native Shropshire, had settled in the neighbourhood of Stourport, some three or four miles from Bewdley. Here, in a time before grass grew on the banks of the Severn and when the rivers and canals of the West were the highways of nascent industry, he and his kind, the younger sons of younger sons, relinquishing the agricultural processes by which their fathers had lived, gave themselves to the making of iron. It was a hard struggle, and there were times when it seemed it must end in failure. But the genius of the age was in their favour, the population was rising, and a world of purchasers coming into existence throughout the world who wanted to buy English goods. Getting rich was in the air. Stourport was the first of the industrial towns that sprang up along the banks of the canals—a thriving, go-ahead little place that was actually lighted with gas before London. And when, amid the wars and bustling competition, the flushed booms and black depressions of that vigorous era, the young ironworks seemed at its last gasp, the repute for hard work, shrewd sense and honesty that Worcestershire men had learnt to associate with the name of Baldwin stood the

bearer of that name in good stead. The local bank was ready to risk part of its modest resources to meet the need of a local man. "It was from the old bank one hundred and twenty years ago," Stanley Baldwin told a Worcester audience in 1923, "that we raised, with infinite difficulty, £500: it was the old bank that helped to carry us through the crisis in the 'twenties of last century. . . . Time and time again did they stand our friends in days when we were less able to stand on our own feet than we are now, and I shall never forget it."<sup>1</sup> It was all part of the old English tradition of local trust based on personal knowledge and neighbourhood.

Inch by inch the Baldwins grew rich. Alfred Baldwin, father of Stanley, did not enjoy the advantage of a public school and university education in his own youth: he sent his son to Harrow and died worth a quarter of a million. But, rich or poor, the Baldwins remained provincials of the provincials: Bewdley, Stourport, Wilden, or Kidderminster, Clee Hill was never far away, and shrewd eyes, looking out from a stolid background, saw the eastern edge of its high-reared head as other Baldwins back through the centuries—small squires, yeomen and farmers never far removed from the peasant—had looked on to its northern slopes. They passed from land to iron, they made Stourport, they lived around Bewdley. But they still held by the same ideal of gentility and proprietary honour by which their

<sup>1</sup> *On England*, 15.

male progenitors back in Shropshire had abided. They did their best to love their neighbour, rich and poor, served God and honoured the King. They believed in and practised the ancient feudal rule of England that those who had privileges should bear burdens. They treated the men in the works as their forebears had treated their tenants and farm hands, not according to the new fashionable belief that factory hands were abstract commodities governed by the laws of supply and demand, but as human beings and neighbours with a natural right to friendliness of manner, security of status and an hereditary share in the well-being of the business. In ill-times they looked after them and their womenfolk, regardless of balance sheets and profits. They believed that personal goodwill was the first asset in a man's capital. They were Tories, not Radicals.

Alfred Baldwin was a great, dark-eyed, bushy-eyebrowed, bearded man with something of the look of an English lion gazing out of a forest. He was silent, straightforward and immovably honest. Under his reserved nature—terrifying to strangers and to those who did not know him well—he was generous and tender, almost to excess. His marriage was a romance that lasted throughout life. He had wedded at the age of twenty-five the daughter of a Wesleyan minister of Highland ancestry, George Browne MacDonald. She came to share the austere and rather lonely life of the Worcestershire iron-

master from a very different *milieu*: two of her sisters had married rising young artists, Edward Burne-Jones and Edward Poynter, and another by her marriage to Lockwood Kipling, an Indian civilian, was to be the mother of the most meteoric literary genius of his age. She was highly strung, nervous, something of an invalid—a Celt of Scottish and Welsh ancestry, now blended with this purely Saxon strain of Baldwin. She and her silent, stern-looking husband brought to each other something that each nature, so diverse, craved. They were so much lovers that when their only son was born they felt it needful to caution each other to be particularly tender towards him lest he should think himself a stranger.

Something of a stranger, perhaps, he was. He lay on the floor of his father's house close by the works at Wilden reading books, a gentle, eager, sensitive child with a shock of fair hair. His early pictures reveal a keen, delicate little face of great sweetness. His mother was much confined to her room, and his father with his growing interests much away: when he was at home he seemed silent, as was his nature, and his son was content to love him with something of awe and at a distance. But the child, lying comfortably on his stomach on the hearth-rug before the winter fire, or in the summer in the orchard at the back of the house, was scarcely lonely. There was an old library in the house, and very early he discovered the companionship of books. The

people in them were his friends of whom he thought and with whom he conversed for hours at a stretch—more real than any of the phantasmagoria of the world about him. Long afterwards their words, phrases, and sentences came back to him to cheer strained hours and illuminate dark places.

There was an old aunt who stayed in the house, with whom he was often left alone for long periods. She would let him read to her on autumn and winter afternoons, and encouraged him to explore Scott, whose books, loved by his parents, lay thick on the shelves of their library and whose steel engraved frontispieces and vignettes he used to pore over even before he could read. The picture of Dirk Hatteraick breaking Glossin's neck strengthened his child's faith in justice, and Di Vernon, leaning on her father's arm, was his first love. Before he was nine he had read aloud all of *Guy Mannering*, *Ivanhoe*, *Red Gauntlet*, *Rob Roy*, *The Pirate*, and *Old Mortality*. Then he discovered *The Lay* and *Marmion*, and strode book in hand down the high-hedged country lanes on lonely tramps, or sat under the summer's idle hedge declaiming long passages : one line in particular struck his imagination so that he would repeat it over and over again :

“ William of Deloraine, good at need.”

All the mystical, dreaming strain of the boy's half Celtic blood was stirred by the imaginative

solitude of his existence : each book devoured re-peopled his world : after reading Grimm, the Worcestershire woods were filled with witches, maidens and dwarfs, and the men and women, fiends and ogres of the *Pilgrim's Progress* were so real to him that he could almost repeat the book by heart. And *Peter Simple* and *Midshipman Easy* helped to swell the same glorious company.

He was the more fortunate in his literary education, for his mother and her clever sisters had been brought up among books and spoke of them together in the presence of the child as of old familiars. They spoke of "Bozzie" and "dear Lamb," with a sort of wistful look as though they were friends who had been buried four or five years back, and the boy took them to his heart on trust from them. So also it was with Thackeray and Jane Austen and Borrow, in whose wonderful sounding names he revelled. Living so much to himself, more formal lessons in the English classics appealed less : his mother's attempts to introduce him to Wordsworth before he was ready for it by the process of dictation was not a success ; some hard Saxon streak in him of his father's making rebelled at the line :

"The street that from Oxford hath borrowed its name,"

and long afterwards he could still recall the look of wonder with which he turned to her as she read it out and expected him to commit it to paper. He was more at home with history, whose

joys he had first glimpsed through the tinted window of Scott's *Tales of a Grandfather*. There was a beautifully illustrated edition of Froissart in his father's library, which he loved to pore over, dreaming of the long romantic tale of his country. And from Scott he passed to Macaulay and Froude, Carlyle and Clarendon, the apologists of noble causes, who, for all their bias and lack of science, make English history flow through the mind like a stately river.

English history was written for the boy not only in the books he read but in the landscape around him. Whenever he climbed up to the rose garden on the little hill behind the house, he could see the country-side over which young Charles and his fugitive men had ridden after Worcester fight. Past the place of his birth and the fields through which he walked flowed the Severn—"the river on whose banks I was born, the river that, age-long, has divided Celt and Saxon in their secular strife that now, I hope, has ended." And sometimes he would look up the river from the bridge into the mysterious and romantic land of Shropshire from which his own people had come three generations back. He could see the smoke of the train running along the little railway through places that bore names that found an echo in his heart—Wyre Forest, Cleobury Mortimer, Neen Sollars and Tenbury. They told of the day when Normans rode armoured between the sheen of the cherry trees—and of still older wars

“When Severn down to Buildwas ran  
Coloured with the death of man.”

The boy's imagination took fire in a land so full of the history of his own race—of names like the Welsh Gate and the Warden of the Marches, and “memories of the long-forgotten strife between Welsh and English, of Ludlow, where the big castle still stood, and of Woodbury Hill where Owen Glendower came before the great fight beneath its slope.”<sup>1</sup>

Yet it was not wholly of remote history that the Worcestershire landscape spoke. All day long, from across the narrow lane, the sound of the engines of his father's forge throbbed through the old house at Wilden: it was so insistent a noise that one scarcely noticed it save when it ceased. And outside, when the wind blew from the west, the smoke from the works chimney trailed swift and black across the garden, soiling the rose leaves and covering even one's bread and butter with tiny smuts. Once at night a countryman gazing skywards saw the gigantic form of a man with a hammer striking at his anvil across the reddened clouds: the reflection had been thrown there by the intense glare of the furnace before which he laboured.

The boy who lived among such sights and sounds would have been less than human had he not felt an interest in the men who turned the wheels of the romantic industry which he

<sup>1</sup> *England*, 8-9.

grew up to regard as his hereditary craft. It began at the blacksmith's shop. He would stand at the door and hear the roar of the blast, and on great occasions, with a thrill in his heart, was allowed to work the big bellows. How exciting the smell of the smithy was—"the curious, acrid smell of water thrown on the red-hot iron, the warm steam of the cart-horses, the burning hoof when the shoe was being fitted."<sup>1</sup> And best of all was the smith himself: once with admiration he saw the great man strike the shoe by accident against his palm, when, wonder of wonders, nothing happened but the sizzling noise of burnt horn and an exclamation of justifiable dissatisfaction at his own clumsy workmanship.<sup>1</sup> How he longed to have a horny hand.

On Sundays the whole neighbourhood, field and iron worker alike, met in the parish church. The congregation came in tall hats and some of the older workers still wore the smocks of an earlier age. "I can see once again," Mr. Baldwin described the scene in after years, "the pony cart and the landau on the road, people in knots of two or three coming down the lanes, and the little crowd that gathered in the churchyard, discussing the events of the past week, while the peal of bells, whose music had been the companion of the last half-hour of our walk, yielded to the urgent shriller note of the five minutes' bell. Then the smell of freshly baked loaves in

<sup>1</sup> *This Torch of Freedom*, 142-3.

the porch, waiting for distribution after the service, the baize door, and we passed into the church to the big pew in which I spent so much time counting the ten torteaux in pile of the Episcopal arms in the east window, and trying to catch the wandering eye of one of our servants in the gallery."<sup>1</sup> The scene belonged to an England that has now almost passed away, when men lived out their lives according to an ancient and tranquil pattern, protected by status and judged and, if found worthy, rewarded by the stern, kind test of neighbourhood.

The listening child heard Sunday after Sunday the words of the Liturgy. "The language of the English Bible leaves its mark on you for life."<sup>2</sup> It left its mark on that small Worcestershire boy, who in after years, when a generation of British rulers bred in confused learning was wont to speak with the tongue neither of men nor of angels, but of long-winded pedagogues, still addressed a great people at core homely in words of one syllable and familiar phrases that appealed to their hearts as well as their brains. It taught him to sift the second best from the best, to shun shoddy, to detect rubbish whenever it appeared in the form of words. The country people who sat about him had learnt their power of speech in the same school. A common experience and a common heritage were the links between them.

Being left a great deal to his own resources, he mingled much with them. They were always

<sup>1</sup> *This Torch of Freedom*, 141.    <sup>2</sup> *Our Inheritance*, 295.

glad to welcome the sturdy, fair-haired boy who was heir to the Hall and the Forge. There was an aged shepherd with a face like an old pippin who could neither read nor write, but "like many men of those days who could neither read nor write, was a great deal more intelligent than many who can do both now."<sup>1</sup> He talked in the undiluted tongue of old England, the speech of Shakespeare's rustics, and it was full of wisdom learnt by experience and patient, country living. And there was another man, from whom the child learnt much, the foreman at the Forge, who in his far youth had served his apprenticeship in the harsh school of the first Industrial Revolution, and had laboured when ten years old in a twelve hours' nightshift. He was a rough old chap, but honest and wise, and he judged life by standards that had been tested in the fires of reality. In after years some of his pithy lessons came back to the boy whose unconscious tutor he had been: "needy folk must have," was one of them. With such friends Stanley Baldwin gained sympathy with and affection for the common man, "of whom," he once said simply, "I am one . . . I learned instinctively and unconsciously . . . that a man is a gentleman by what comes from within."

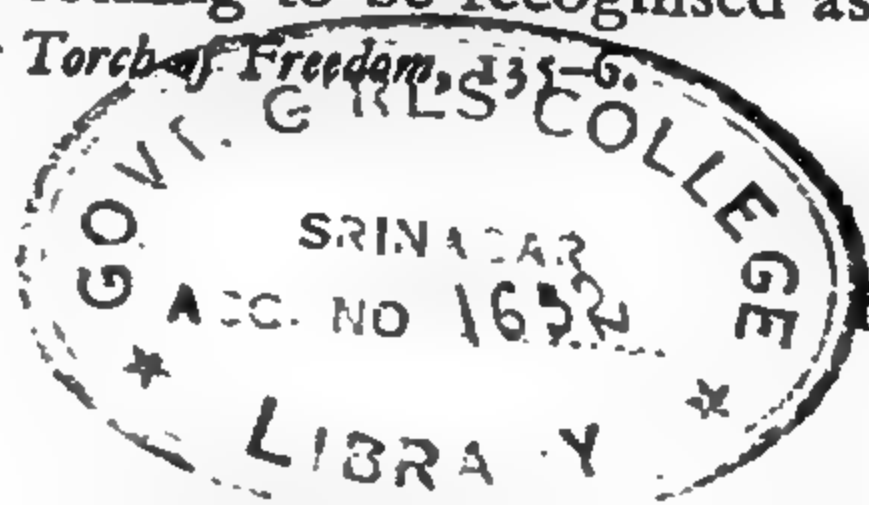
Perhaps it was easier for a boy in the 'seventies of the last century to learn to love his countrymen than it is to-day: that age was nearer to the green fields and the full healthy life of the past

<sup>1</sup> *On England*, 16.

than our own feverish century. The types who cross Shakespeare's and Dickens' pages were still frequent: the boy loved to recognise the latter in the men and women whom he saw about him. Once, at the age of ten, he made a long journey to Birmingham to watch twenty-two of the Midlands play cricket against an eleven of England, and listened with straining ears to Tom Emmett and George Ulyett cracking jokes that could scarcely be told to-day:<sup>1</sup> the land was still full of rude, vital life. But nowhere could a boy have learnt more of the old England than at Wilden. His father's hereditary business was one of the last iron forges left in the rural districts: the men who served it were still peasants at heart, though they laboured by the furnace and not in the fields. The cold day-dreams of bookish solitude were humanised by that daily contact with workaday, homely humanity: he gained in warmth of sympathy, humour, and unconscious understanding.

For all the hours of solitude amid the books and fields of Wilden, there was another influence which bound the growing lad to the main stream of life. Every now and then there would be wonderful contacts with his mother's brilliant relations. They belonged to a world very different from that of the queer, silent house beside the forge. Burne-Jones at Rottingdean and Edward Poynter at Wood Lane on the western outskirts of London were coming to be recognised as the

<sup>1</sup> *This Torch of Freedom*, 135-6.



first painters of the age. To little Stanley Baldwin they were something more. They breathed, as he found in his visits to them and his cousins, "an atmosphere of art and culture, of wit and humour": they were men who "with a lump of greasy pigment on the end of a hog-bristle brush" could turn things inanimate into things divine: they were artists who worked for the joy of working and painted all the time. "They were men who worked at what they loved and who felt it was due to the art they loved to give it every power that God had given them."<sup>1</sup> That was another lesson he learnt. Here he would meet William Morris, who tried to bring him home an Icelandic pony but limited his present in the end to a Welsh one, and here also, as well as on rare occasions at his own home, he would meet his cousin, Rudyard Kipling, two years his senior in age and ten in precocity. And sometimes, accompanied by his uncles and cousins, he would be taken for exciting holidays abroad: to Madeira when he was nine and later to Germany—the old Germany of song and legend and placid peasants smoking and drinking beer. It was splendid for a boy to have such uncles, and he used to think that everybody else's uncle was a painter who toiled at his glorious task, even in his holidays, for the sheer joy of doing so.

When he went to school, he was in advance, both in learning and knowledge of life, of his fellows. At his private school he was amazed

<sup>1</sup> *On England*, 104-5.

after his first forty-eight hours to discover that none of his coevals had even so much as heard of Scott. He was shrewd enough not to allude to the fact: "being one who liked going his own way with as little friction as possible, I dreamed my own dreams and kept my own counsel." At Harrow he went quickly up the School: well grounded on the classics, so that he could say the Odes of Horace backwards and forwards, he was in the Sixth by the time he was sixteen. There he met his first reverse: a prolonged difference of opinion with his Headmaster over a trivial matter, which might not have meant much to a less sensitive boy, but which seemed to him at the time an injustice—something to be encountered often in later life and taken in his stride as of small account. "I vividly remember a Prime Minister," he said, in humorous recollection long afterwards, "no less a man than Mr. Gladstone, coming down to my school. Politically opposed to him as I was, I waited eagerly for the message. . . . When Mr. Gladstone opened with the words, 'Your admirable Headmaster,' I felt that the Prime Minister was so out of touch with the whole of the life I was leading that I never listened to another word."<sup>1</sup>

There was a strain of Quaker blood in young Baldwin, an obstinacy derived from certain of his forebears which mingled curiously with an otherwise placable disposition. Then as later he found that on a matter which he conceived

<sup>1</sup> *On England*, 94.

to be one of principle he would rather go to the stake than give way. He felt he had been unjustly treated, and, having no redress, was anxious to be gone from a place which he had once loved and in later life was to love again. He left Harrow of his own choice early, and never regained the calm stream of academic life. At Cambridge, where he went to Trinity, he made no attempt to make himself the scholar he could so easily have been and which in after life he was so much to regret. Yet those two or three years of idleness at a critical age had their value: "I attribute such faculties as I have," he once said, "to the fact that I did not overstrain them in youth." They also brought him into closer contact with one whom he had hitherto admired and loved at a distance: his stern, bearded, warm-hearted father. An intimacy, begun late, ripened into a deep sympathy and understanding. There was nothing of the artist in his father, but there was all of the man. He had much to give his son at this moment.

It is curious to reflect that at this period of Stanley Baldwin's life his country might easily have exchanged a Prime Minister for a man of letters or an artist—or perhaps for something less. The side of his nature that he inherited from his mother was now very strongly developed: it might, but for his father, have swallowed all the rest. Driven back on himself at school, he wanted to become an artist, like his uncles: to express himself in a world where reality was full

of imperfection. He was a dreamer: he even dreamed that he might become Prime Minister or Chancellor of the Exchequer, a phenomenon more common in artists than in men of action. He spent much of his time playing the piano, on which at this period of his life, in the opinion of good judges, he might easily have become an accomplished performer: thought a great deal about pictures and books. He had thoughts too about this time of the Church: the vague mysticism of the introspective mind that inspired *John Inglesant*, a book he dearly loved, was in the air: sensitive, sheltered men were groping back from a vulgar, materialistic age—the age of Bradlaugh and the middle Forsytes—to the dreamers of the seventeenth century. The spirit of his Methodist forebears who had given themselves to the Gospel as a means of growing into the likeness of their Master was blended with this dreamier, less certain mood. Something of that mood was reflected in one of the loveliest passages in his first book of speeches, in which he recalled his first visit to Italy, taken in early manhood with his uncle, Edward Poynter. “I remember many years ago standing on the terrace of a beautiful villa near Florence. It was a September evening, and the valley below was transfigured in the long horizontal rays of the declining sun. And then I heard a bell, such a bell as never was on land or sea, a bell whose every vibration found an echo in my innermost heart. I said to my hostess: ‘That

is the most beautiful bell I have ever heard.' 'Yes,' she replied, 'it is an English bell.' And so it was. For generations its sound had gone out over English fields, giving the hours of work and prayer to English folk from the tower of an English abbey, and then came the Reformation, and some wise Italian bought the bell whose work at home was done and sent it to the Valley of the Arno, where after four centuries it stirred the heart of a wandering Englishman and made him sick for home."<sup>1</sup>

It was just such a reflection as might have come to John Inglesant as he stood, an exile from England, on Italian soil. There was another occasion, on a June evening during his first long vacation, when the mystic that was never far beneath the surface of his being took possession of him: that also, its emotion recalled long afterwards in tranquillity, found utterance in his speeches in another time and age:

"The long day had at length faded into warm twilight. The hills, shrouded where they rose from the valleys, were cut like indigo-coloured cameos against the lingering after-glow. I was walking slowly across a wide common in Worcestershire, waiting for the warning light of the great beacon on Malvern which was to give the signal for the chain of beacons running north to carry the glad news of the jubilee of Queen Victoria's reign. How

<sup>1</sup> *On England*, 92-3.

often in our history had these same hills sent out their fiery message, to Briton and Roman, to Saxon and Dane. But this night it was a message of rejoicing and thanksgiving and pride to the inheritors of twenty centuries of racial, religious, political, and economic struggles. So this night at the appointed hour the first flame shot up on Malvern, and one by one each hill took up the tale, until I stood in the middle of a vast illuminated circle, the nearer fires showing the people attending them, and the remoter dwindling in size until they merely blazed as stars on the horizon.”<sup>1</sup>

It was a poet who spoke.

But his father had cast him for another destiny. The Baldwins were hereditary makers of iron, and Stanley's path was plainly marked out for him though it was probably far from that which he would then have chosen for himself. All unconsciously he had been trained for it from birth: even at Harrow he had been taught by his father to keep regular accounts. At twenty-one, he crossed the road to the Forge and started his life as a man of business and industrialist at two pounds a week. It was part of the appointed scheme of things that he should go through the mill.

Going through the mill at first must have seemed an uncongenial experience. But it proved in the end a better school than a London

<sup>1</sup> *This Torch of Freedom*, 272-3.

studio or a poet's attic. It gave him a rule by which to govern the common concerns of life: a background of method, order and concentration. There was no time now for dreams or romantic ambitions. Wilden taught him to rule his comings and goings, which with his poet's half-Celtic blood might easily have been erratic. It brought out the strain of decisiveness lacking in the other half of his nature, though it did not wholly destroy the procrastinating mystic that lay beneath. For twenty years he lived by the clock, until punctuality and the doing of the work of the day, in the day, had become an unshakeable habit.

The discipline of a regular life was strengthened and sweetened by his marriage at the age of twenty-five to Lucy Ridsdale, whom he had met a year before while staying with his uncle and aunt at Rottingdean. With her to rule his house and growing family, he made his home at Dunley Hall, a few miles from Stourport. Hence for fifteen years he would set out each morning by trap or on foot to reach the works at his wonted hour of 8.45, where he would stay till five or six, before walking back through the fields beside the river. Strength, wrote George Meredith, is the harvest of quiet years. It was so with Stanley Baldwin. The tranquil years of provincial life, of pure air, regular rule and exercise and early nights built up the reserves of basic vitality which were afterwards to support burdens which were not

his alone but England's. Like Cromwell, when in

“ His private gardens, where  
He lived reserved and austere  
(As if his highest plot  
To plant the bergamot).”

he lived for the first two formative decades of manhood as a provincial in the land where he had passed childhood and boyhood and whence his fathers had come. He farmed a few acres, bred pigs and won prizes at village flower shows, played cricket for Areley and sang in the choir at Wilden.

Local life gave him more than physical strength. It gave him earth in which to plant those deep roots from which his knowledge of England grew and the inward power that came from that knowledge. In the year of his marriage his father entered Parliament as member for West Worcestershire, and from that time onwards Stanley Baldwin was the real director of the daily work of the business. As a captain of industry he was responsible for his men. And he was responsible in the older sense, even then fast vanishing from all but rustic life : it was his lot to look after those who turned the wheels of his business, not so much as an employer bound to them by a transitory cash nexus, as an hereditary chieftain whose own self-esteem was bound up in their continued security and well-being. They in their turn looked to him as his father's son, himself known to them since childhood—

the Master Stan' they had watched riding his pony or welcomed with pleasure on his return home for the holidays from Harrow. Such a relationship had in it more of the family than the works. Many years later, in one of the most moving speeches ever heard in the House of Commons, he recalled, for the benefit of an age that in its search for wealth and paper efficiency had forgotten the feudal obligations, his early memories of Wilden. "It was a place where I knew, and had known from childhood, every man on the ground; a place where I was able to talk with the men not only about the troubles in the works, but troubles at home and their wives. It was a place where the fathers and grandfathers of the men then working there had worked, and where their sons went automatically into the business. It was also a place where nobody ever 'got the sack,' and where we had a natural sympathy for those who were less concerned in efficiency than is this generation, and where a large number of old gentlemen used to spend their days sitting on the handles of wheelbarrows, smoking their pipes."<sup>1</sup>

Oddly enough, he added, it was not an inefficient community. It was not so for the best of reasons: because its economy was founded not on statistics compiled in an accountant's office, but on the laws of human nature—on the ancient belief, for centuries transmitted into practice by the people of this country, that men

<sup>1</sup> *On England*, 34.

work the better for being trusted and treated as though they were free men with a right to security and status.

Trust was the essence of that business : mutual trust and confidence between man and man. Strikes and lock-outs were unknown ; it would have seemed to all concerned a ridiculous method of settling differences—a species of suicide that could only end in destroying the organism on which all alike depended, not only for livelihood but for the structure of social life. Everybody engaged in the concern had, as it were, a vested interest in it, like the copyholders on a landed estate in the older rural civilisation. Even the old men who smoked their pipes as they sat on their wheelbarrows were encouraged to think that they were still worth the service for which they were paid : “for Heaven’s sake don’t let him think himself useless : pay him his wages as long as he can come here,” was Stanley Baldwin’s closing instruction after a talk with the foreman about one ancient whom both had admitted to be totally inefficient. Once, in a half-hearted attempt to apply the newer methods of scientific industry, an analysis was made of the intelligence percentage of the men employed at the Forge : in most cases it proved very low. There was never any question of getting rid of them. “Thirty per cent,” was Baldwin’s comment, still remembered at Wilden ; “why you couldn’t expect an average intelligence of more than that. I don’t see why you should :

you're bound to have people like that." He was coming to love men and women, not as most people do for what they would like them to be, but for what they actually were.

That lesson he learnt in his daily intercourse with the men who depended on him for leadership. It was the custom of the place that they should take to him their troubles. Day after day he was being confronted with human nature, not in the abstract, but in its struggle with a hard world, and all the poet that was deep in him was stirred by the recital of the common joys and sorrows of humanity. When anything went wrong the first thing everybody did was to ask for Master Stan'. So, one of the men, who had been celebrating a victory of the Wilden Cricket Club in a Kidderminster tavern and had continued his revels, contrary to by-law, on the back of a tram, took his Police Court summons to the man whom he had known since childhood. When the two of them came out together after that embarrassed confession, both were seen to be laughing: later a friendly and apologetic letter went under Master Stan's signature to the magistrate. A wife whose husband bullied her was given shrewd advice about the virtues of an ashplant: troubles became halved because they were shared. And there was a never failing source of deep humour as well as of poetry in that time-honoured relationship. Once a man came to the young master and began awkwardly and with a troubled face: "You know, Master

Stan', last week I got married." "Yes, of course, but what of it?" "Well, you see this is very awkward: last night the bed broke." It was a custom of the firm that any ironwork required by the men personally should be done at cost price, and the embarrassed bridegroom, not liking to brave the laughter of his mates, had hit on the happy plan of asking his employer to send the broken bed to the works in his own name. So it came to pass that a broken iron double-bedstead was carried to the Baldwins' house at dead of night, whence it subsequently made its way to the forge for repair in their name. Broad comedy of the rustic, Shakespearian school was lurking behind the contacts of daily life: in after years the homespun captain of village industry, turned Prime Minister, drew in his hours of relaxation on that humour as on a well of healing water. One tale in particular he loved to tell of how one of his neighbours complained to him of the trouble he was having with his feet. "Sometimes they smells that bad," he said, "I can scarcely bear to stand over 'em."

And there was kindness as well as humour: kindness born of experience of other people's sufferings that saved a man who was half a poet from the curse of the poetic nature—the inward turning mind and self-pity. To this day at Wilden, men speak with indignation of the occasional reports that have appeared in Press and book of individual acts of Stanley Baldwin's goodness: the car ordered from the local garage

to take so-and-so's sick wife to Birmingham Hospital : the present of money in time of need left anonymously at somebody's house with elaborate precautions to conceal the sender's identity that seldom deceived. "As if," they say indignantly, "there was anything unusual in that ! Why, he was doing it the whole time !"

The man to whom all this kindness seemed a mere custom of the country—the unspoken obligation of his wealth and place—was growing yearly in stature as a man of business. In the works they learnt to be proud of his shrewdness : there were plenty of other business men who could see the next move and anticipate it : but Master Stan' possessed the power of seeing further ahead : of visualising the reply one would get and the reply after that. In the last years of the nineteenth and the early years of the twentieth century the firm prospered exceedingly.

Yet they were not altogether easy times for industry : least of all for a small patriarchal business conducted as were the works at Wilden. There came a day when the process of amalgamation that was going on in heavy industry all over the country could be resisted no longer, and the family ironworks became converted into a limited liability company, merged into a greater concern as Baldwin, Ltd., with big interests not only in Worcestershire but in South Wales. There came also another day

when there was a strike in the coal-fields ; one which was no concern of the little community at Wilden, yet which profoundly affected the lives of its members. "It was one of the earlier strikes," said Stanley Baldwin, telling the story long afterwards in the House of Commons to illustrate an economic truth, "and it became a national strike. We tried to carry on as long as we could, but, of course, it became more and more difficult to carry on, and gradually furnace after furnace was damped down and the chimneys ceased to smoke, and about one thousand men, who had no interest in the dispute that was going on, were thrown out of work, through no fault of their own, at a time when there was no unemployment benefit. I confess that that event set me thinking very hard. It seemed to me at that time a monstrous injustice to these men, because I looked upon them as my own family, and it hit me very hard—I would not have mentioned this, only it got into the Press two or three years ago—and I made an allowance to them, not a large one, but something, for six weeks to carry them along, because I felt they were being so unfairly treated. But there was more in it really than that. There was no conscious unfair treatment of these men by the masters. It simply was that we were gradually passing into a new state of industry when the small firms and the small industries were being squeezed out, and business was all tending towards great amalgamations, on the one side of

employers, and on the other side of the men, and when we came in any form between these two forces, God help those who stood outside ! ”<sup>1</sup> It was a painful realisation.

In such ways Stanley Baldwin was trained and dedicated by providence for the task which was to be set him—a leader of men to succour ailing industry and the great nation that lived by it in its hour of need. It was by these contacts that he gained what he described as “a knowledge and a sympathy very difficult for any man to attain who has had an exclusively political training. I regard it,” he explained in retrospect, “as of the greatest value to myself that during the formative years of my life and during the ten and twenty years when I first started work in the world, I worked in close contact with all classes of people in this country, and enjoyed, through no credit to myself, the goodwill which I have inherited from generations that have gone before me and left behind a name for honesty, fair play, right judgment, and kindness to those with whom they worked. Through that, whether I succeed or not, I believe I have an understanding of the mind of the people of the country which I could have gained in no other way. It is through this that I have that ineradicable belief and faith in our people which sustains me through good times and evil.”<sup>2</sup> And because of that he was to have confidence

<sup>1</sup> *On England*, 35.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

in a dark hour that, whatever troubles might come to the country, the native strength and virtue of the British people would overcome everything.

There were other ways, in those early formative years, in which he found the mind of England. From his father he inherited a tradition of public service. It was the custom of his family to take a part in local government, and his wife encouraged him in it. He made his first entry into politics in his twenties as a member of Areley King's parish council. He was so punctual a councillor that local history records that on one occasion the entire business was done by the Chairman and Secretary and the meeting over before the rest of the Board, with native slowness and deliberation, had arrived at their wonted hour. He also became Chairman of the Wilden School Managers: he still is. And in the local Friendly Societies, whom his father had always encouraged and befriended, he was soon a very great man indeed. He became a Forester, and an Oddfellow, and spent his evenings at their gatherings. There was not a Lodge in all that countryside in which he did not dine. Like Cromwell, long before he became known to England, he won the respect of his own neighbours.

To help his father, he canvassed his constituency—fifty miles of rural England. From Upton-on-Severn and the Malverns to the edge of Wyre Forest in the north, his face and homely speech became known. The men he talked with

in cottage porch and bar parlour became his friends : with the inner sense that peasants share with the beasts, they responded instinctively to his own warmth of feeling for them—their humour, their intuitive wisdom, their kindly rustic virtues. He became popular—the popularity that comes not from trumpeted fame, but from good repute. Wherever he went his neighbours were glad to see him and to exchange gossip and jest over pipe and cider. Even at this period he could not walk down the sunlit street of Bewdley without being stopped by every other man : and to-day, as twenty years ago, there is scarcely a cottage in West Worcestershire that does not display his photograph.

For nine years, while his father, exiled by his sense of duty from Worcestershire, laboured in the alien atmosphere of Westminster, Stanley Baldwin served on the Worcestershire County Council, making his first speech, while Queen Victoria was still on the throne, in opposition to an overdue local sewage scheme—"a thoroughly reactionary proceeding" : Lincoln's introduction to politics was much of the same sort. Like Master Shallow, he became a Justice of the Peace. He also took his place, like his father, as a Director of the Great Western Railway and of the Metropolitan Bank, concerns which served the public needs of the neighbourhood.

In 1906 he stood for Parliament—as Tory Candidate for Kidderminster. The tide was

running fast and furious against the Conservatives, and he did not get in. It was the disastrous Chinese Labour Election; and the old Party of Bolingbroke, Pitt, and Disraeli was split from top to bottom by Balfour's fear of Joseph Chamberlain's crusade for Tariff Reform; not since the days of the Old Pretender had the Tories suffered such a rout. The time which a few dreamers such as Disraeli and Rhodes had long foretold was at last approaching, when the century's monopoly of British manufacturing for an agricultural Europe, was ending under the shadow of rising tariff walls, behind which our foreign customers were building nascent industries of their own. To a man like Stanley Baldwin, who lived in close contact with the realities of the industrial situation, Tariff Reform and some measure of trade reciprocity seemed the only means of averting the day of economic reckoning. It was under that banner that he went into battle against the noisy cry of Cheap Food.

The Kidderminster election was one of the last in England fought in the old rough and hearty Eatanswill manner. The candidate was expected to spend his evenings in public-houses, "listening to and vociferously applauding what, for want of a better name, was called on the *lucus a non lucendo* principle, comic or humorous song."<sup>1</sup> When he came home from these orgies, feeling the need of a moral purge, he took down

<sup>1</sup> *On England*, 89-90.

his Horace from the shelves, the *Aeneid* or *Odyssey*, and read "not without labour in the dictionaries, not always with ease, but with care and increasing joy."<sup>1</sup>

For all the while that he was labouring in local business and politics, he kept his imagination sweet. He had not forgotten his books and the poet he had once meant to be. Like Gladstone, he remained a learner all his life and continued to educate himself. In the evenings and on railway journeys, taken in the course of his growing business, he read quietly and steadily. He learnt to know the English classics as only a chosen few know them. In this also he strengthened the foundations of his love for kindly erring mankind. "If I found a human face light up at some quotation which ought to be known by everyone," he once wrote, "that man, be he duke or dustman, is my brother."

The time was now come when his work at Bewdley was accomplished. In 1908 his father died, and he succeeded as a matter of course to the constituency which his father had represented since 1892. He was returned unopposed. Henceforward the centre of his life shifted from Astley, the pleasant stone house he had bought himself amid the wooded hills west of the Severn, to London. He went there, not as most men do to carve out a career, but as a fulfilment of his service to the local community and as an hereditary duty. He was at Westminster as the

<sup>1</sup> *On England*, 89-90.

representative not of himself but of the men and women who dwelt beside the Severn. And it was of them, and of the men who like himself lived by industrial enterprise, that he thought most during his days and nights in the House.

## CHAPTER II

### THE RISE TO POWER

**I**T was as an industrialist chiefly that Stanley Baldwin made his contribution, such as it was, to the labours of Parliament in those early days at Westminster. From the time of Disraeli's death till the cataclysmic defeat in 1906 the great Conservative Party had retired, as it were, to Hatfield, whence it had governed the country with some distinction and much dignity. But firmly entrenched in the mellow wisdom of the Salisbury tradition, it had scarcely moved with the times; perhaps there had seemed no need to. Unhappily the times had moved without it. A new clamorous democracy, impatient of stately privilege—the Kippses and Ponderevos of a more rootless and dissatisfied social class than had been seen in England since the Wars of the Roses—was irreverently questioning all dignity and wisdom that derived from a past of which they knew nothing. And in the great industrial towns, the proletariat of Marx's gloomy and prophetic dream, created at last by the dehumanity of joint-stock trading and the amalgamating processes of big business, was rumbling in its anger. In 1906 the old

demi-Whig, demi-nonconformist Liberal Party astutely cashed in on these discontents. The Conservatives were left in a hopeless minority in the Commons, though still in overwhelming strength in the last chamber of hereditary privilege, the Lords. But the Liberals, having won their battle, discovered that they had done nothing to stem the tide on which they had been borne to victory. For all the speeches of their younger demagogues, their leaders had little real understanding of the demands and needs of their supporters. The buzz of brilliant kindly talk and the clink of champagne glasses in Downing Street belonged to a different world from the angry faces of Limehouse and the Rhondda Valley.

For the storm was blowing up fast, and the professionals of the platform who ran so swiftly before it were soon perceived to be running away from it. The broken decade that came between the Liberal victory and the outbreak of the War was an era of unresolved strife, whose bitterness seemed to be increasing and moving towards some unimaginable climax of hatred and horror—war between capital and labour, between privileged man and militant womanhood, between one brand of Irishman and another, and all the elements of a vast confused empire who took one side or another in that angry Hibernian conflict. True that on the surface the tenor of English life went on peacefully enough: the white top-hats and the black moved decorously as of old across the lawns at Ascot and Lords,

and brakes of returning cricketers rode merrily homewards, between hedges festooned with dog-roses, towards the lights of welcoming pubs. But beneath the surface there was fever in the body politic: Englishman spoke angrily of Englishman, and the glare above the factory chimneys of the awakening North and Midlands spelt out against the night sky the letters of approaching strife.

It was as the first shadows of that alien warfare fell across the English landscape that the member for West Worcestershire rose to make his maiden speech. The occasion was the Eight-hours Day Bill, introduced into the House by the Liberal Government under pressure from the Miners' Federation. The speech was plain and quite devoid of those parliamentary arts of epigram and declamation which were still the fashion in the noisy, half-theatrical mimic warfare of the pre-war House of Commons. But, though few present set much store by it, it went straight to the heart of the industrial situation. He spoke of his gladness of the chance of saying a few words from the point of view of those whom he and his family had represented for four or five generations—the class which was once called masters and later capitalists and now capitalists with an epithet in front of the name. He had fought the last election as a tariff-reformer and had been beaten: and the cry that had beaten him had been the time-honoured Liberal slogan that the country should

take care of the consumer and the producer would take care of himself. Yet here were the representatives of the labouring miners coming to a Liberal Government and telling them with a pistol at their heads, "Take care of the producer, and let the consumer go to—the textbooks of political economy!" There was sense, humour, and irresistible logic in what he said. It had little effect.

For the same reason he opposed Lloyd George's famous Budget: not because he disliked high taxation for the rich, but because he saw that it afforded no cure for the wasting disease that was already attacking British industry. In a speech in Worcestershire, delivered in 1909, he foretold what was coming to pass.

"The stricter tenets of Cobdenism no longer charm the people and our opponents are unwilling to confess that they have made a mistake in judging the trend of public opinion. It is quite clear that the cry of cheap food and economy will be powerless to resist the tide that is coming in. There is only one way in which Cobdenite finance may make specious provision, and that is by introducing a Budget on lines which give no permanent increase of Revenue from the new taxes—a kind of rainbow end which it is hoped people will run after to find the proverbial cruse of gold at its base. Accordingly a campaign is entered upon in which an attempt is made to stir up the envy

and hatred of the poorer people against the richer people—not realising that the only way to increase the permanent prosperity of the country is not by threatening industry and spoiling individuals, but by taking such steps to protect trade as will increase the amount available for wages. This course will alone make money filter through to the people. I am against the Budget as a whole because it is brought in as an alternative to Tariff Reform. As a Tariff Reformer I am against anything that will lead people, though only temporarily, away from what I believe is the only policy that will save the industries of this country and the wages of the people in the years of international competition that are ahead.”

During the next eight years he spoke little in the House: once in March, 1909, on the unfair competition of foreign tariffs (with a first tilt at the then all-powerful Lloyd George, who in exchanging the Board of Trade for the Exchequer had become “a mere shadow of his former self, wandering in a sort of Celtic twilight among figures”): again in 1911 on Unemployment Insurance: and again in 1912 on the Dockers’ Strike when Ben Tillett with arms raised to Heaven had prayed an avenging God to strike Lord Devonport dead. In the course of the last Stanley Baldwin expressed his belief that no greater tragedy could befall a country than a big lock-out or strike. “I can hardly imagine,”

he said, "any circumstance under which I would be a party to a lock-out on a large scale. . . . The great tragedy of these general strikes is that, when so many of the men's leaders think to promote the interest and the welfare of their own class and to elevate them and raise their wages, I feel perfectly certain that the only result of those strikes must be, so far from raising their position, to depress it." And he spoke sadly of the new spirit of bitterness and irresponsibility which was creeping into the slowly growing system of collective bargaining between the Trade Unions and the employers' organisations which in his opinion alone could bring peace and new order to industry.

The sum total of his speeches between his entry into the House in 1908 and the War was five. Yet though he spoke less than almost any other man in the Chamber he was not without his influence on his fellow members. There was something in the character of this quiet, little sandy-haired man with the resolute face that appealed to them. He began to be as much liked in the House as he had been in his native Worcestershire. It was the strength of his hold on these two allegiances—the goodwill of Worcestershire and the goodwill of the House of Commons that stood him in such stead in the crises and battles of his later life. Though all the world outside might decry him, in these two places he was known and liked. The first he won in the quiet years at Wilden and the second

between his first entry to the House and his rise to power. It was in the Smoke Room rather than on the floor of the Chamber that he was best known. Here, as T. P. O'Connor has recorded, he was "never the centre of an admiring circle of friends or political opponents, never the master and guide, if not the dictator, of the conversation. . . . Stretched in a half-leaning position at the edge rather than the middle of the group on the benches, sucking steadily at the briar root pipe," he seemed just one of the rank and file, a listener rather than a speaker. And yet when he spoke, which was seldom, he was always regarded, for all that he said was terse and simple and free from any semblance of wanting or seeking an audience. And it was the same in the House. "He sought the obscure seats, and avoided the seats of the mighty. He did not try, as so many of the young and ambitious do, even the comparatively small conspicuousness of the corner seat. . . . He wasn't playing a game. . . . He did not crave for notoriety or plaudits; he almost exaggerated the part of the humdrum Englishman of business who had his job to do and did it unostentatiously and thoroughly and left the rest to fortune."

It was not only by the best of the Tories that he was liked—the squires of honest worth and tradition and the more responsible industrialists—but by the rough men who represented the mass phalanxes of Labour from the coaly North and Midlands. The Labour men had come back in

1906 for the first time as a compact Party, very conscious of their own growing strength and resolved to force the pace for the top-hatted gentility and bourgeoisie of the Tory and Liberal benches. They were rough, suspicious of every time-honoured parliamentary manœuvre and occasionally obstreperous. But they liked Baldwin, for there was no escaping the fact that Baldwin liked them. He did not see them, as did so many of his fellow Tories and possibly still more Liberals, as a species apart: for he was free from the peculiar tendency of the age to bestow all his sympathies on his own class. Like the men of an earlier age he belonged not so much to a caste as to a locality. He was not a member of the upper class, but a Worcestershire man. To him a working man from Kidderminster or Stourport was a good deal nearer than a capitalist from Bayswater. He at least had something to talk to him about—the view of the Shropshire Hills and the jokes that circulated in the pubs of a red sandstone country that liked literal fact, especially when it happened, as fact so often does, to impinge disconcertingly on specious theory. He had learnt during forty-one years of provincial life to like the common man: in a sense the commoner he was, the more he liked him. He knew something of his joys and sorrows, and was anxious to help him. He did not like many of the aspects of modern industrial civilisation; felt that they struck at common humanity and wished to change and alleviate them. And,

because he understood them, he could not do as some of his fellow members did, lean forward to murmur "Swine," or bawl angrily across the House as the Labour men advanced their uncouth and forceful opinions, or irritate them with clever scornful, ironical speeches. They might be speaking treason or rashly advocating mass-robbery, as it seemed to the unimaginative benches of the Right, but they were honest and solid Englishmen out of the same mould as the men he had known since childhood. He gave them credit for good and honest intention, and, being British, they respected him for it. And, wherever he could, he supported what he felt to be their legitimate claims both inside and out of the House. He was one of the twelve Conservative members who voted for the second Reading of the Old Age Pensions Act, and both as a Member of Parliament and as an ironmaster and a Director of a great Railway he worked hard to secure recognition for organised Labour: Jimmy Thomas, then one of the firebrands of young militant Labour, tells of frequent meetings with him in those years to discuss ways and means of creating a machinery for collective bargaining. He was essentially friendly towards Trade Unionism, which most men on his side of the House still regarded as a dangerous force. To him, modern industrialism without Trade Unions seemed an impossible anarchy.

During these early years in the House he was still able to retain a fairly active contact with his

business concerns and with his own country. In 1910 he was forced to fight an election, owing to the Liberal desire, not so much to deprive him of his seat—of which there was little chance—as to keep him in his own constituency and so prevent him from assisting neighbouring Tory candidates with his clear-headed, convincing Tariff Reform speeches, which, as a local paper testified, were increasingly hard to answer. It was a not unwelcome interruption to the routine of Westminster: he was glad, he said, to be among the hills again. “A true son of a worthy father,” he was warmly greeted at such pleasant centres of local political activity as Callow End and Powick, Clows Top and Far Forest, the Talbot Hotel at Hartlebury and the Red Lion at Upper Snodsbury. He sat over warm cider cans in bar parlours and expostulated gently with aged loyalists, one of whom insisted on heckling a Tariff Reform propagandist from London under the impression that being a “foreigner” he must be hostile to the local cause: “Why,” he was forced to ask this confused and obstreperous worthy, “do you make such a devil of a row?” To Stanley Baldwin it was all part of the breath of being; here was the raw, lovable material of that body of local opinion which trusted him and on which he knew he could always fall back. He could afford to be generous to his opponent; he appealed for a courteous hearing for him on the grounds that he was only likely to be in the constituency for three weeks, and hoped that

he would carry away as pleasant recollection of West Worcestershire as he had himself. His expectation was fully justified, for his old constituents returned him with a thumping majority.

They were more than constituents for they were friends and neighbours. He knew all their names and faces, and stored them up in his wonderful memory for such things which seemed to grow better with time. He was never so happy as when among them, tramping the hills with a pipe and a congenial companion, talking with every countryman met by the way. His children when asked to accompany him liked to enquire whether a walk or a tramp was intended, so as to be forearmed with sandwiches: he was known to turn a casual stroll imperceptibly into an eighteen-mile expedition. Those wonderful walks were almost the best things life offered: like his books, the sources of spiritual life on which he drew in the hurly-burly of London and public affairs. Once on one of them he met an old country woman who hailed him with an Elizabethan salutation of "May God, goodwill and good neighbourhood be your company": it pleased him so much that he had it engraved on his card of Christmas greeting.

It must have seemed strange to turn back from the time-hallowed peace of Worcestershire to the dark horizon that faced imperial and industrial Britain in the summer of 1914: in Ireland the first shots had already been fired, and

in the great industrial cities the bitterness between man and master showed no sign of ending. In August, 1914, the sky became still darker: suddenly the world was at war. Yet for many Englishmen the greatest tragedy the modern world has known seemed almost a relief, for it seemed to offer a solution to problems that had proved insoluble. For a moment in the face of overwhelming external danger, Orangeman stood side by side with Home Ruler, and the man of Labour with the man of Capital. Yet it was only a respite: for both the Irish and the industrial problem remained, and for neither could the day of settlement be postponed indefinitely.

Stanley Baldwin was one of the few in those early days who did not suppose that the War would end soon. He was under no illusions, for his shrewd, far-seeing mind, accustomed to reckon the price for things, told him what it must cost. Amid the hopes and alarms of that first autumn, a neighbour and constituent who a day before had been all hope came to him with a face clouded with anxiety. "Yes," said his member, more grim now than was his wont, "I know it's very worrying. But this war's going to last a long time, so we've got to worry now and then."

He was forty-seven, too old to fight in the trenches and heavily burdened with public responsibilities, Member of Parliament, a Director of the Great Western Railway and Vice-Chairman of Baldwin, Ltd., the great Swansea iron and coal firm. He cast about in his mind how he could

best help his country. During the Boer War his father had paid the weekly contributions of all members of the Friendly Societies in West Worcestershire who served in the Forces. The son now did the same, with the difference that instead of a chosen few the whole qualified manhood of the countryside was now serving. Before many months had passed he was paying several thousand contributions weekly. The Courts of the Friendly Societies offered to release him from an undertaking whose magnitude they felt he could scarcely have foreseen: he refused and continued to pay the contributions till the last man returned. Meanwhile he placed his wealth freely at the disposal of every war charity within his knowledge: £500 went in one cheque to the Union Jack Extension Club, £5000 for the endowment of a bed at a Kidderminster hospital, another £1000 for another at the Worcester Infirmary in memory of a friend who fell at Contalmaison. Another old friend who had pleaded for some cause in which she was interested and which was in sore plight because of the nation's crisis, found five Bank of England notes each for £1000 pressed into her hand: his wealth, the donor reckoned, had come to him through little merit of his own and he could not now withhold it from his country. *Donorum Dei dispensatio fidelis* had been the motto of the school on the hill where he had learnt to con the lesson taught to Peel and Byron: it had been implied in every step of his life.

He still retained his old love of doing good by stealth. Two saintly old ladies, painfully poor themselves, with whom he was remotely connected, kept a small home in Gloucestershire for mentally defective girls, which the war had reduced to its last resources. Hearing of their plight he collected £200 in old notes, wrapped them up in a piece of newspaper and directed his next long walk to their door, where he bribed a small boy to deliver them with an anonymous note, as from a passing tramp who might himself one day require the shelter of a home for the feeble-minded.

Not that he can have had much time for walks during the War years. Like other men of generous heart who were too old to take their place in the line, he sought work as a duty. And being a man of unusual integrity and ability, versed in the conduct of business, such work readily presented itself. In the House he served on the Judicial Committee set up to deal with enemy aliens, and, more important, on the War Loans Committee, where his financial knowledge and clear head for figures was of considerable value.

Yet somehow he felt dissatisfied with his part in Parliament. For the first time in his life he was perhaps a little disillusioned. It was not that he was personally ambitious of a great career for its own sake: it was not for that he had left his native woods and hills. But he could not help experiencing that saddening sense which all men

of ability and honesty who take any part in public life must feel at the realisation that those who control great affairs are not necessarily great men. And he was conscious, for all his simplicity and humility of heart, of talents which were not being used to the extent of which he knew them to be capable.

That was his mood in 1916. He had spent eight years in the House, and was growing tired of bumping vainly to catch the Speaker's eye. He told his wife that he thought he could do better work in the world by returning to Worcestershire. "I'm no good here," he said: "better go back." She thought he was right, but felt it would be better to postpone the decision for a little longer: "Let's give it ten years," she said. Her coaxing prevailed, and he waited. At the year's end, when his sojourn was almost over, his chance came.

Among those who had been struck by some subtle quality in this solid West Countryman of business, which though hidden from men of commoner clay was always apparent to one or two, was a young Aberdonian in the Civil Service named J. C. C. Davidson. Though still only in his late twenties he had already seen much of public men in high place, several of whom he had served in turn as private secretary—an office for which he had a quality amounting to genius. At this time he was Private Secretary to Bonar Law, the leader of the Conservative Party and Chancellor of the Exchequer in the new Coalition

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Government. Possessing exceptional gifts of persuasion and a shrewd power of judging men far in advance of his years, he used both to the lasting benefit of his country, and persuaded Bonar Law to appoint the quiet man for West Worcestershire with the steady eyes and the firm mouth as his Parliamentary Private Secretary. The recommendation was backed by the Chairman and Chief Whip of the Conservative Party. It was accepted.

A year later came a further opportunity, when, again on the recommendation of John Davidson, Stanley Baldwin was appointed an unpaid Junior Lord of the Treasury. Then fortune took a hand in the game. The Financial Secretary of the Treasury, Sir Hardman Lever, was a man of figures appointed in the careless, dictatorial manner of the times from outside the House of Commons. He did not even take the trouble to get himself elected to this apparently now useless debating chamber. Instead, he went on business of State to America. The House, accustomed from time immemorial to use the Financial Secretary as a kind of Aunt Sally, objected, and the Prime Minister felt it best to conciliate opinion by appointing a second Financial Secretary who was also a member. Thus it came about that in the summer of 1917 Stanley Baldwin became Joint Financial Secretary to the Treasury, and so took a principal part in the preparation of the vastest Budget the country had ever had to face. It was—though he knew

it not—the end of his long service to Worcestershire : henceforward he was to serve a greater cause. He resigned his directorships and devoted himself wholly to politics. His time had come.

The experiment was a success. The hecklers in the House found they got as good as they gave. For the new Secretary of the Treasury was very much awake, and quite sure of himself on financial questions. He told them all they asked for and then added, in a kindly, casual sort of way, little disconcerting pieces of information for which they had not asked, and which made it quite clear to everybody that they really knew nothing about the subject. Yet he did it all with such an air of smiling directness and sweet reasonableness that no one could object. And after the Budget in the spring of 1918, when the German armies were knocking for the last time on the gates of the Channel ports, opinion in parliamentary circles hardened still further in his favour. “This alert, straight-speaking man from Worcestershire,” wrote one of the Lobby correspondents, “gives the impression that he knows what he is about. To listen to his crisp, clear-cut statements is to be conscious of a feeling that here is a Chancellor of the Exchequer, not nascent in the making, but actual and already made. There is a big career ahead of that alert and efficient square-peg, the member for the Bewdley Division. . . . He has found his *metier*. When next a Unionist Government wants a

Chancellor of the Exchequer, he will be heard of."<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Baldwin had been right.

Personal success was attended by public fortune. During three strange, half-delirious autumn months, an astonished Britain, that had almost given up hoping, saw the decline and fall of the German armies in the field. On November 11th the War was at an end, and everyone suddenly burst out singing. Prior to the speedy creation of a new earth fit for heroes to dwell in, the supreme architect of victory went to the country to obtain a mandate to hang the Kaiser and make Germany pay, and the House of Commons was subsequently filled with the flowers of victory, those hard-faced men who looked as though they had done well out of the War. The Financial Secretary of the Treasury, whose business had also automatically and unavoidably done well out of the War, was not happy. He was acutely conscious that something was wrong with the state of Denmark.

Of the mood that afflicted him in that hour of careless rejoicing he has left a memorial in one of his speeches. "I am one of those," he said, "of whom there are many here, who when the War broke out were too old for active service, but who were possessed in those days of the War with a consuming desire to do something for our country, and to look round to find where we could most usefully give service. But as the War went on, the effect of it psychologically was

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 6th June, 1918.

curious. Many of the things that had played a large part in our lives before shrank into insignificance, and we felt that the world could never be the same again to us who had grown to maturity in the years of peace. I think some of us found that we were getting to cling much more loosely to material wealth, and to realise that wealth was made to be a servant and not a master—that as a servant it had a most useful function to perform, that as a master it meant damnation. I think, too, we felt this: we were not peculiarly impressed with speeches that talked of the glorious time that was coming after the War. We realised what the War meant in the world. We felt the foundations of civilisation in Europe cracking. We knew as business men that for a generation this country and the world would be as a whole far, far poorer, and we realised early the struggle that must result to repair the cracks in the foundations of our civilisation and to restore to the country that level of prosperity which she had enjoyed before the War. I think, too, many of us had little faith in supermen. I think that our experience in business had taught us that, as a matter of fact, there are no such things as supermen, and that we should have to rely on the innate common sense, integrity, courage and faith of the common men and women of this country if we were to make good.”<sup>1</sup>

His habit of looking far ahead, learnt in the

<sup>1</sup> *On England*, 45-50.

quiet days at Wilden, enabled him to scan the national horizon with clear and steady eyes. He saw the storm that was blowing up, and characteristically and without reference to anyone but himself, prepared himself to play his part in setting the ship to face it. He was not the helmsman, and the men of careers and genius were high above him on the bridge, and he did not conceive it to be his lot or to be even possible to interfere with them. At the glittering hour, purchased by a million British dead, when all the greatest statesmen were departing with their costly entourages for Versailles to refashion a broken world in a hall of mirrors, the member for West Worcestershire took his own counsel. His mind moved slowly, but once it had reached the deciding point there was no changing it. He made his resolution: then, since it affected them, he told his children of it. On the 23rd June, 1919—a few days before the Peace Treaty was signed—the following letter appeared in *The Times*:

“SIR,—It is now a truism to say that in August, 1914, the nation was face to face with the greatest crisis in her history. She was saved by the freewill offerings of her people. The best of her men rushed to the colours; the best of her women left their homes to spend and be spent; the best of her older men worked as they had never worked before, to a common end, and with a sense of unity and

fellowship as new as it was exhilarating. It may be that in four and a half years the ideals of many became dim, but the spiritual impetus of those early days carried the country through to the end.

“To-day, on the eve of peace, we are faced with another crisis, less obvious, but none the less searching. The whole country is exhausted. By a natural reaction, not unlike that which led to the excesses of the Restoration after the reign of the Puritans, all classes are in danger of being submerged by a wave of extravagance and materialism. It is so easy to live on borrowed money; so difficult to realise that you are doing so.

“It is easy to play; so hard to learn that you cannot play for long without work. A fool’s paradise is only the ante-room to a fool’s hell.

“How can the nation be made to understand the gravity of the financial situation; that love of country is better than love of money?

“This can only be done by example, and the wealthy classes have to-day an opportunity of service which can never recur.

“They know the danger of the present debt; they know the weight of it in the years to come. They know the practical difficulties of a universal statutory capital levy. Let them impose upon themselves, each as he is able, a voluntary levy. It should be possible to

pay to the Exchequer within twelve months such a sum as would save the taxpayer 50 millions a year.

"I have been considering this matter for nearly two years but my mind moves slowly ; I dislike publicity, and I hoped that someone else might lead the way. I have made as accurate an estimate as I am able of the value of my own estate, and have arrived at a total of about £580,000. I have decided to realise 20 per cent of that amount or, say, £120,000, which will purchase £150,000 of the new War Loan, and present it to the Government for cancellation.

"I give this portion of my estate as a thank-offering in the firm conviction that never again shall we have such a chance of giving our country that form of help which is so vital at the present time.

"Yours, etc.,  
F. S. T."

No one at the time recognised the fact that the letters F.S.T. stood for Financial Secretary of the Treasury. Four years were to pass before that sacrifice, under the glaring publicity that floods every past action of a man who has become Prime Minister, was to become known to any but his closest intimates.

His chief, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, did not know : only his faithful ally, J. C. C. Davidson, who as Private Secretary had to be present

in the room when the Chancellor burnt the cancelled bonds. The donor had privately made one stipulation to Davidson that he was not to be summoned to his chief's room to see the act of burning: he felt he would be unable to resist snatching the bonds from the flames. He must have realised that it was far more than a fifth of his capital that he was giving to his country, for he well knew the nature of the storm that was threatening both British industry and the business on which his fortunes depended. Within a few years the nominal value of his capital holding in the hereditary business on which he had based his calculation had dwindled to a sum far smaller than the securities, bought for cash, which he had surrendered to his country. He had not only expiated the "blood money" which had come to him so unasked during the War, but he had made himself a comparatively poor man. He had also, if he was not accounted one before, made himself an aristocrat. He had proved, for a leaderless age that had forgotten it, the enduring truth of the political principle of *noblesse oblige*. Only one other Englishman is said to have followed his example.

A year later three thousand Oddfellows at Bewdley presented Stanley Baldwin with a silver rose bowl as some mark of appreciation of his action in paying the contributions of their combatant members during the War. In January, 1921, the Ancient Order of Foresters followed suit with a silver salver, representing the goodwill of

18,000 members. Very poor men in the Severn Valley had tumbled over themselves to find subscriptions. "The secret," the local paper thought, "was that Mr. Baldwin had touched a chord in men's hearts." In his speech of reply he explained why the work of the Friendly Societies made so great an appeal to him: the greatest movement in the country, as he saw it, because it was not a partisan movement, and had nothing of the perilous and prevailing tendency to fly into sections and fragments and factions, and to quarrel instead of pulling together. It fostered the only force which could build up the world—the force of love. "Cherish the spirit of Friendly Society work," he concluded, "for in it lies the possibility of restoring the nation to material and spiritual prosperity." His words foreshadowed in miniature all that he was to strive for in the coming years.

It was time for someone to preach such a spirit. Four years of a resort to force in every corner of the world in the name of sacred ideals had shown men how easy it is to achieve human ends by violence. Though sacred ideals were now at a discount, the habit of violence in thought and action remained. The war had ended in the maroons and bugles of 11th November, 1918; it had been formally buried amid the midsummer pomps and rejoicings of 1919. But in plain fact it still raged in many parts of the world. There was civil war in Russia, mass murder in Bavaria and Hungary,

starvation in Vienna, riot and revolution in Ireland, Egypt, and India. Russia fought Poland and Turkey Greece. And everywhere, in the politics of peace, men used the words they had learnt in the violence of war. The very pacifists talked aggressively of offensives and united fronts, of pushes and counter-attacks. Though Lloyd George rhapsodised about a new world fit for heroes, it began to look as though the old one would soon only be fit for yahoos.

We have seen that the Britain which turned from domestic alarms to face the tempest of a world war was a land of unresolved discords. Before the War had ended that of Ireland was again clamouring for solution. It was not by conciliation that men sought any longer to solve it. After the Easter Rising, Sinn Fein was endowed liberally with the blood of martyrs. Violence by one side begot new violence by the other. A sentimental journalistic movement with little hold on the country was transformed into a bloody and national crusade. The extremist was everywhere enthroned. In the post-armistice Election of 1918 Sinn Fein swept the country, and the victorious candidates, refusing to go to Westminster, set up an Irish Parliament, the Dail Eirann in Dublin. Nor was it only a rival parliament that refused all further truck with Saxon ideals in an awakened Ireland: the I.R.A., Sinn Fein's army of gunmen in rainproofs, challenged with murder and ambush the R.I.C.'s claim to preserve the law. A British Government

which had learnt how wars are won answered force with force and instituted reprisals. Villages were burnt and murders committed to establish the imperial rule of justice, law, and order. A British Field Marshal, after a conversation with a British Prime Minister, recorded that the latter defended his Irish policy on the grounds that for every loyalist assassinated, two Sinn Feiners were somehow annihilated. "He seemed to be satisfied that a counter-murder was the best answer to Sinn Fein murders." The Field Marshal added his soldier's opinion that this seemed a crude idea of statesmanship.<sup>1</sup>

Ideas equally crude prevailed in other parts of the Empire and at home. In India the preaching of terrorism and the murder of Europeans was followed by a ten minutes' fusilade on a defenceless crowd, which restored order at a cost of three hundred and seventy-nine killed and twelve hundred wounded. Imperial violence was matched by domestic. The year of victory was marked by a series of mutinies and strikes: in several of the big cities tanks paraded the streets and machine-guns were set up at street corners. The coming of universal suffrage, granted by the Coalition Government in the hour of victory, seemed to herald the violent end of democracy and of government by discussion. Parliament was at a lower ebb in public esteem than at any time since the seventeenth century. A General Election, won by what looked suspiciously like

<sup>1</sup> Sir Henry Wilson, *His Life and Diaries*.

fraud, had resulted in a victory which left the representatives of four and a half million voters in a minority of one to two against the representatives of the other five million. In short nearly half the electorate felt itself virtually disfranchised. And the other half, seeing that the Prime Minister governed with small reference to Parliament and seldom attended its debates, felt itself little better.

Labour had fifty-nine representatives in the post-war Parliament: but its backing in the country was far greater than this figure suggests, and it was growing every day. In 1908 when Stanley Baldwin entered Parliament the Trade Unions had had a membership of about two millions: by 1920 it numbered eight and a quarter millions. Those who controlled the policy of the Unions were growing increasingly antagonistic to the social and economic philosophy of the existing rulers of the State. Accepting without much thought but with great enthusiasm the nostrums of the Socialist intelligentsia, they wished to take over the means of production and supply in the name of the community with the least possible delay. And as they did not yet control the community through the statutory organs of government, they proceeded to substitute a government of their own. A moribund Parliament was challenged by a militant Trade Union Congress, which pronounced itself the Parliament of Labour: "You," declared one of its delegates, "who have sprung from the loins of the common people are infinitely more

representative of the aims and aspirations of this country than the House of Commons." And a Council of Action was set up, a kind of revolutionary Cabinet, to enforce executive action on the country in the interests of organised Labour. Its members spoke of declaring a general strike to establish their rule.

The utmost violence of language in political controversy prevailed at this time. A leading organ of the Left, reporting a speech of a member of the Coalition Government, began: "Mr. Winston Churchill of the Brass Face erupted again last Saturday," while Mr. Churchill himself described the idealism of the extreme Left as a "foul baboonery." "Murderer," was a stock Socialist term of reference for employer and Cabinet Minister: in many confused minds the words were synonymous. An epidemic of strikes swept the country: in 1919 even the police came out. The Government replied in kind with military metaphors: the Prime Minister described himself as "fighting Prussianism in the industrial field as we fought it on the continent of Europe." Extravagance of living in high places was matched by universal extravagance of thought and word. "I see in every industrial centre of our country," wrote George Lansbury, "a growing mass of men and women becoming imbued with wrath and hatred, settling down to parasitical lives of indolence and ignorance, and I see the classes who wax richer and fatter each day by living on the labour of those workers who

are permitted to toil. I see these rich and powerful ones engaged in the infamous business of driving those who work deeper and deeper into the bog of poverty—poverty that is of mind as well as of body—and over it all is the spectre of another and an early war which once again will call forth all the bitterness and hatred of which man is capable.” It was a not unfair expression of public feeling.

To save men from that slough came Stanley Baldwin. His reputation in his own Party had been slowly but steadily rising, even though the chiefs of the Coalition, seeing him in the light of their own brilliance, regarded him as a man of mediocre talents. In 1920 he had been made a Privy Councillor. In the early spring of 1921, the Tory chief, Bonar Law was forced by increasing ill-health to retire from the Government. A reshuffle of the Cabinet became necessary, and Stanley Baldwin, as a sop to the Conservatives on whom the Coalition mainly depended, entered the Government as President of the Board of Trade. A by-election being rendered necessary he went down to Worcestershire to contest his seat. Though there was no official opposition, a certain Mr. Mills put himself forward as People’s Popular Candidate. Mr. Mills was a Republican, a reviler of established institutions and an enthusiast for Russia, where people were dying in hundreds of thousands under the rigours of the Soviet experiment. At the moment it almost looked as though a similar experiment was about

to be tried in Britain, where the Triple Alliance of Railwaymen, Engineers, and Miners was threatening a widespread strike in order to secure the Miners' demand for national as opposed to district wage settlements. The public was exceedingly alarmed: strikes of a lesser kind had been of almost daily occurrence during the past two years when wages were high and trade was booming: now when in every industry prices were crashing down—the export price of coal had fallen from 115s. to 24s. a ton, or 15s. below the cost of production—nothing could be expected from the manual workers but revolution and red ruin.

It was, therefore, with some confidence that Mr. Mills, employing the now familiar weapons of class warfare, talked of idle capitalists, parasites, and “the order of the cabbage stalk.” The war between the nations was to be followed by the war between the classes, and it seemed at least probable that the most numerous class, the proletariat, would win. But if the People's Popular Candidate thought so, he reckoned without the natives of West Worcestershire. The contest was overshadowed by the anxiety arising out of the industrial crisis, and the streets of Worcester, just outside the constituency, were thronged by unemployed marchers and khaki-clad troops, but there was never any doubt as to the result of the Bewdley by-election. Though the Conservative candidate was compelled by the national emergency to leave the campaign

mainly in Mrs. Baldwin's hands, his supporters made no secret of their contempt for the People's Popular Candidate. They had heard a great deal from Mr. Mills, one of them said, about the shirker and the good-for-nothing: but in Mr. Baldwin they had one who could be one of the most leisured men in the kingdom if he chose, yet who never sought ease but was out to serve his country and to save it. They returned him to do so by a nine to one majority.

He took his place in the government. The great strike of the Triple Alliance did not materialise: but remained, like the T.U.C.'s talk of a General Strike, as a threat against the future. Prices and wages continued to fall and the figures of unemployment to rise: from 200,000 in the summer of 1920 they rose to 1,300,000 in March, 1921, and to 2,000,000 in the following year. For all the Prime Minister's talk of making a land fit for heroes, social conditions remained as bad as ever: it was calculated that there was a shortage of at least 350,000 working-class houses. A heavy burden fell on the President of the Board of Trade, for it was trade that everyone demanded in that hour of agony, and with a poverty-stricken and disordered world, now in the trough of post-war depression, trade was hard to come by.

Stanley Baldwin had his own remedies, and they were those that he had advocated throughout the whole of his political life. He believed that the times had changed, and that the open

sesame of Free Trade was no longer of any avail for his countrymen. Foreign nations were no longer prepared to take our manufactured goods : they preferred to subsidise their own industries to make them and to build up tariff walls behind which British trade could not penetrate. With populations content with a low standard of living, they were able to produce at a far lower cost than was possible in a country where the principle of internal Free Trade, however much honoured by lip service, had long ago been abandoned in favour of protection by subsidies and guaranteed wage agreements. Their surplus goods they dumped at starvation prices on a defenceless British market.

In the conditions of such a world some measure of reciprocity and protection for the home market, if only for purposes of bargaining, was essential. But the popular national prejudice in favour of Free Trade, created by the great Manchester propagandists of the early Victorian age and strengthened by the long prosperity of the era of British manufacturing monopoly, was still strong, particularly in the older generation of voters. A Coalition Government, presided over by the high priest of a Party which treated Free Trade as a condition of faith, was not likely to advance far on the road to Tariff Reform. But during the War a Liberal Chancellor of the Exchequer had given a small measure of protection to a few specialised manufactures by imposing import duties, and, in view of the

rising figures of unemployment, these were now extended by the Safeguarding of Industries Act to certain "key" industries. It was the task of the President of the Board of Trade to administer this Act.

The Act had been very loosely drafted and its practical interpretation was difficult. The President had three qualifications for his task; he was convinced that the duties, though inadequate, were of value, he was accustomed to the despatch of complicated financial business, and he had a flair for persuading people to be reasonable. These assets he now brought to the delicate adjustment of the duties on such articles as hooks and eyes, safety pins, and dolls' eyes. In doing so, though still unknown to the general public, this "quiet-spoken, fair-haired, intellectual-looking man, whose speeches bring into happy unison literary grace and clarity of exposition,"<sup>1</sup> won golden opinions in the House. Even the Lobby Correspondent of the *Daily Herald* described his management of the Board of Trade Vote as "a pretty Balfourian performance. Instead of statistics, he quoted the witticism of a lady with whom he had dined, an epigram by Lord Melbourne, and the motto he had read that very morning on his calendar. He said not a word about the Safeguarding of Industries Act, although the Vote had been put down for that day on purpose to give Captain Wedgwood Benn an opportunity of attacking him upon it,

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 11th May, 1922.

which the Captain did in a speech which was like a flight of barbed arrows, but provoked from Mr. Baldwin only the slightest sort of rejoinder."<sup>1</sup> Yet he got his measure through, and in the teeth of determined and prolonged opposition.

Another writer in the Press, which for the first time was beginning to notice him, described him as a shrewd man with keen, clean-shaven face, firm lips, and resolute chin, with a hint of whimsical laughter in the corners of his eyes, who was always hurrying to his next job and didn't look in the least like a Cabinet Minister. This last attribute was not displeasing to a public which was heartily tired of Cabinet Ministers. "A pipe is his inseparable companion. You will notice him at public dinners and luncheons, when other Cabinet Ministers are smoking Corona Coronas, produce a well-seasoned briar, and, through its homely smoke, survey political orators with what appears to be almost a benign tolerance."<sup>2</sup>

In the Cabinet he seldom spoke. Like Brer Rabbit he lay low and said nothing. But he was a good listener. Consequently he came to know a great deal more about his brilliant colleagues than they ever learnt about him. He was not favourably impressed. There seemed to be an absence of principle in the way in which they dealt with the problems of a great nation, postulating ten future problems for every one they

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Herald*, 23rd October, 1922.

<sup>2</sup> *Daily Mail*, 11th July, 1922.

solved, and a looseness in the presentation of fact that shocked a man who had been brought up to conduct his own business on lines of strict and literal probity. Brilliance, he began to think, was synonymous with a rapid capacity for changing one's ground to suit one's convenience. He found that he disliked it very much. But he kept his counsel and minded his own business. Only when the affairs of his Department were concerned did he make his presence felt. Then he was adamant. He fought for weeks over the duty on fabric gloves and carried his point. He made it clear that, were he unable to do so, he was quite ready to go. He never made any pretence of personal friendship for the Prime Minister. He was in the Coalition Government to represent his Party: that was all. His colleagues found it hard to temporise with a man who had no desire to retain office for its own sake. He might be a fool, but he could not be disregarded. And his reputation for sincerity and honesty in his own Party made it unsafe to discard him.<sup>1</sup>

For the Conservatives were growing increasingly restless at the direction, or rather lack of direction, of the Coalition Government they supported. A great political Party can only

<sup>1</sup> "Mr. Stanley Baldwin is not leaving the Board of Trade much as the Prime Minister and the Coalition Liberals dislike his handling of the Safeguarding of Industries Act. What worries them is that Mr. Baldwin is an honest politician."—*John Bull*, 15th July, 1922.

continue to exist by adherence to certain broad historic principles which assure it the allegiance, irrespective of temporary expedience, of a substantial section of the population. But the Coalition Government and its volatile Prime Minister seemed to have no other aim but the maintenance of their own supremacy, and to achieve this appeared ready to pursue almost any course. In the beginning of 1922 an attempt by the Prime Minister to force another snap General Election, in order to secure a further spell of power before the rising discontent of the country came to a head, had led to an open protest from the Chief Conservative Whip. But the difficulty of the critics of the Coalition was that there was no alternative government except that of the Socialists, whose utterances at this time were so extreme and revolutionary as to make every sensible and moderate man shudder. Almost all the public talent and experience of the country was enrolled under the banner of a Prime Minister who was acknowledged as the first political genius of the century and whose prestige as the organiser of victory was such that to many the idea of his removal was unthinkable. It needed a man of heavier metal than honest Sir George Younger to break up an alliance of such talent as Lloyd George, Winston Churchill, Lord Birkenhead, Arthur Balfour, George Curzon, Robert Horne and Austen Chamberlain.

Such was the political atmosphere of the summer of 1922 preceding the famous Carlton

Club Meeting which brought down Lloyd George and established Stanley Baldwin as a national leader. In the early autumn of that year public faith in the Government received two shocks, one administered by an unsavoury scandal over the sale of honours and the other by the sudden realisation that the Prime Minister's foreign policy, which frequently ran counter to that of the Foreign Secretary, was likely to involve the country in another war.

It was at this point that the President of the Board of Trade, unconsciously reflecting the opinion of the nation, came to the conclusion that he could stand it no longer. During the Recess he thought it over in his slow, deliberate way: then made his resolution to advocate the withdrawal of his Party from the Coalition and to resign from the Cabinet. Surveying the galaxy of talent that he knew would be opposed to him, he had little hope of success. He told his wife at the beginning of October, when she returned from a cure at Aix-les-Bains, that he was going out of politics for good. "I do not know what you will think of me or what you will say about it," he said. "I have made my decision this time without consulting you. But I could do nothing else."<sup>1</sup> The country was looking for a lead, which it could never hope to obtain from the Coalition. On that issue he was quietly ready to stake all.

He expressed his views forcibly to his Unionist

<sup>1</sup> A. Gowan Whyte: *Stanley Baldwin*, 12-13.

colleagues in the Cabinet, but found little sympathy for them in that quarter. The opportunity to strike came on 19th October, when Austen Chamberlain, the official leader of the Party and its chief representative in the Cabinet, summoned his murmuring followers to a meeting at the Carlton Club to enlist them for another General Election under the flag of Lloyd George. He had no doubt of his ability to carry them with him: after seven years of Coalition rule, Cabinet Ministers had learnt to command and members of the House of Commons to obey. But he reckoned without his Brutus. His strong appeal to Party loyalty, his defence of the Government's high-handed imperialism—"alone we have upheld the honour and safety of Europe"—and his advocacy of the national front against the common enemy of Socialism, was followed by a speech of a very different kind from the President of the Board of Trade.

Mr. Chamberlain, the latter said, had put before the meeting the views of the majority of the Unionist members of the Cabinet. It was his duty now to put before them with equal clarity the views of the minority. "As I am only going to speak for a very short time, I will not beat about the bush, but will come right to the root of the whole difficulty, which is the position of the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister was described this morning in *The Times*, in the words of a distinguished aristocrat, as a live wire. He was described to me, and to others, in more

stately language, by the Lord Chancellor as a dynamic force, and I accept those words. He is a dynamic force, and it is from that very fact that our troubles, in our opinion, arise. A dynamic force is a very terrible thing : it may crush you, but it is not necessarily right. It is owing to that dynamic force and that remarkable personality that the Liberal Party, to which he formerly belonged, has been smashed to pieces ; and it is my firm conviction that in time the same thing will happen to our Party. I do not propose to elaborate in an assembly like this the dangers and the perils of that happening. We have already seen during our association with him in the last four years a section of our party hopelessly alienated. I think that if the present association is continued, and if this meeting agrees that it should be continued, you will see some more breaking up. And I believe the process must go on inevitably until the old Conservative Party is smashed to atoms and lost in ruins. I would like to give you just one illustration to show what I mean by the disintegrating influence of a dynamic force. Take Mr. Chamberlain and myself. Mr. Chamberlain's services to the State are infinitely greater than any that I have been able to render, but we are both men who are giving all we can give to the service of the State ; we are both men who are, or who try to be, actuated by principle in our conduct ; we are men who, I think, have exactly the same view on the political problems of the day ; we are men who, I believe—certainly

on my side—have esteem, and perhaps I may add affection, for each other ; but the result of this dynamic force is that we stand here to-day, he prepared to go into the wilderness if he should be compelled to forsake the Prime Minister, and I prepared to go into the wilderness if I should be compelled to stay with him. If that is the effect of that tremendous personality on two men occupying the position that we do, and related to each other politically in the way that Mr. Chamberlain and I are, that process must go on throughout the Party. It was for that reason that I took the stand I did, and put forward the views that I did. I do not know what the majority here or in the country may think about it. I said at the time what I thought was right, and I stick all through to what I believe to be right.”<sup>1</sup>

Stanley Baldwin’s speech changed the history of England. From the moment he sat down the result of the meeting was scarcely in any doubt : there was none when Bonar Law, who had decided to attend at the last moment, supported him. Even a speech by Mr. Balfour failed to turn the tide. By 187 votes to 87 the meeting resolved to go to the country only as a Tory Party under a Tory leader. The Coalition was at an end.

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 20th October, 1922.

## CHAPTER III

### THE UNKNOWN PREMIER

“He is the head of what is probably the last purely Conservative administration this country will ever see.”

*New Statesman*, 26th May, 1923.

AN unknown warrior had slain King David. At that moment all that most people knew about Stanley Baldwin was that he came from Worcestershire, and all that most people knew about Worcestershire, as Mr. Winston Churchill remarked, was that it produced sauce. Yet his chance to prove himself had come : nor, though Providence had had so strange a hand in shaping things, had it come entirely by luck. His merit and character had waited on the occasion. Men realised that as soon as they heard of the Carlton Club meeting and were informed by their publicists of the nature of the man who had destroyed the most powerful Government of modern times. From the descriptions that were given they liked the sound of him, of his quiet straightforward ways, his pipe, his refusal to take himself or anybody else too seriously. Here, after all the alarms and dramatic poses of the past seven years, was just the kind of quiet,

ordinary honest man the nation needed. Even his political opponents admitted it. "If," wrote the *Daily Herald*, "Mr. Bernard Shaw is right in saying that every public man must have a pose of some kind, Mr. Baldwin may be congratulated on having chosen one which is attractive to spectators and relaxing to opponents."

After the Carlton Club meeting, Lloyd George resigned, and the King sent for Bonar Law. That gentle and heroic patriot, though he secretly knew himself to be a dying man, accepted his final task from the hands of his Sovereign. As in 1846 the resolve of the Tory Party to return to the principles which its leaders had abandoned left it for the time being an army almost without officers. The only Conservative of first-rate experience prepared to follow Bonar Law was Lord Curzon, who remained at the Foreign Office. Stanley Baldwin therefore stepped straight into the great post of Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the virtual lieutenancy of the Party.

To secure a working majority, the new Government at once went to the country. Fearful prophets had predicted that the end of the Coalition and a split in the Unionist-Liberal vote would hand over the nation to the rule of revolutionaries. The more brilliant of the ex-Tory chiefs did their apparent best to contribute to this dreaded result by publicly expressing their contempt for this new Government of nonentities, while Mr. Lloyd George spoke pityingly of his successor as being "honest to the verge of

simplicity." But as this was what Mr. Lloyd George was supposed not to be, it seemed to be just what the country wanted. Though Labour increased its representation in the House of Commons to 142, the Conservatives gained a clear majority of 75 over all other parties. The nation had voted for tranquillity—and honesty. *Punch* crowned the Tory victory with a cartoon of "The Man who found himself": plain, bowler-hatted Mr. Bonar Law, with a smile for once on his sad face as he surveyed the election results.

In that election the new Chancellor of the Exchequer, though still little known to the country, played an important part. It was his first appearance on the national stage. He made no bones about the troubles facing the Government and admitted frankly that, if returned to office, he might have difficulty in balancing his budget. After all the frantic boastings to which it had been so accustomed, the nation found such candour reassuring.<sup>1</sup> And his method of dealing with the clever men who sneered at him and his leader for their simplicity was equally satisfying to the English mind. They put him in mind, he said, of a Test Team, who having been superseded by a younger and less experienced Eleven, instead of wishing their successors luck, crabbed

<sup>1</sup> "It was characteristic of the man that on the eve of an Election he had the courage to admit that it might be difficult to balance the Budget."

*Times Trade Supplement*, 4th November, 1922,

their play and told everyone that they had not a bat or a bowler amongst them. For he understood the people of England; like the Bishop of Charles II's jest, his kind of nonsense suited their kind of nonsense.

He knew the need of England too. He saw her as the hope of a world staggering under the burden of famine and revolution—a rock in a maelstrom of change, a land where liberty and justice were in the air her people breathed and where injustice and oppression perished.<sup>1</sup> But he knew that to be those things again, both for herself and others, she had got to put her house in order. Her first need was the restoration of character in public life—a return to that habit of truth and integrity which in the past had been her greatest national asset and on which her trade and world repute had been built.

It was fitting that his first task as Chancellor should be the re-establishment of his country's name for honouring her word abroad. In December, 1922, a few weeks after the Election, he sailed for America to settle the outstanding question of the British War Debt to the United States. During the past year British credit, with all the vast interests in the City of London that were dependent on it, had been shaken by the publication of the Balfour Note. By announcing the British Government's readiness to forgo its right to war debts and reparations

<sup>1</sup> Article by Stanley Baldwin, *Yorkshire Post*, 16th February, 1922.

provided America would do the same, it had caused Americans to imagine that Britain, under cover of a self-righteous gesture, was about to default, leaving the United States to bear the sole cost of everybody's debts.

As the British debt to America was nearly a billion pounds, repayable on demand, the situation was dangerous. The most that Congress, reflecting a public opinion far from favourable to Britain, was prepared to authorise was the funding of the debt for twenty-five years only at  $4\frac{1}{2}$  per cent interest—a rate far beyond the power of the overburdened British people to pay. The most that Mr. Bonar Law had authorised his representative to offer was  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. Yet when the Chancellor of the Exchequer landed in America in the opening days of 1923 American feeling was still almost solid against any modification of Congress' terms. Within a fortnight his straightforward method of doing business had effected a remarkable change. The realisation that Britain under its new rulers was making no attempt to evade her obligations impressed the Commission which Congress had appointed to negotiate: the blunt downright honesty of her negotiator still more. "We trusted Baldwin from the start," said one of the Commissioners. "We never questioned or were suspicious of any statement he made." Had the settlement rested only with them, it is possible that he might even have obtained the terms that the Prime Minister was demanding; but the Commission was respon-

sible to Congress, and Congress to the public. As it was, he obtained the offer of an extension of the period of repayment from twenty-five to fifty years and a reduction of the interest from  $4\frac{1}{2}$  per cent to 3 per cent for the first ten years and  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent thereafter.

Though unauthorised to do so, he at once accepted the American terms. They were onerous, but he was convinced that they were the best that could be obtained: the only alternative would have been a default, which might at that time have plunged Britain into the same economic anarchy as was then taking place in Germany. Everyone acquainted with American opinion thought the same, even Mr. Lloyd George, who though he afterwards described the negotiations as resembling those between a weasel and its quarry, wrote that February in the *New York American*: "A fraction of percentages is not comparable in value to the good understanding between these two great communities on whose co-operation, peace, freedom, and international justice depend." What mattered most was that Britain had returned to her traditional policy of punctual fidelity to her word and made provision for the repayment of the largest debt she had ever incurred. Her credit and goodwill were at once enhanced in every country in the world.

But when he got back to England at the end of January, the Chancellor of the Exchequer was confronted with a Cabinet crisis. Bonar Law, depressed by growing ill-health and the realisation

of the burden that the unavoidable settlement was going to impose on his countrymen in the coming years, hesitated to own it and bitterly upbraided his precipitate negotiator. Without uttering a word in his own defence, the discomforted Chancellor accepted the reproaches of his chief. But he explained that as he had pledged his own word to the Americans, he would have no choice but to go if the agreement were repudiated. He stayed.

He returned to the House of Commons. With Bonar Law visibly failing he found himself virtually its head. All that the country saw was "a Government of apprentices," in part led by "a big business man from the Midlands." Yet even in those early months of 1923—his *annus mirabilis*—those who followed public affairs closely noted there was a good deal more to the Chancellor of the Exchequer than that. It noted a certain trenchant humour: for all his honesty one never quite knew what he was going to say next. "The word *Intelligentsia*," he said, stopping short in one of his speeches, "always seems to me to bear the same relation to intelligence that the word *gent* does to gentlemen." On his return from America he made some remarks to the Press—as cogent as they were injudicious—that earned him abuse in every newspaper in the Middle West. Bonar Law had promised the nation "tranquillity." But to discerning minds there was a promise of something more than tranquillity in his lieutenant.

It was not only humour and sudden revealing candour: it went deeper than that. There was something about this man that at times could touch the chords of the human heart. In the middle of February, following a fiery declamation by a Communist member, he made a speech in the House of Commons that astonished his hearers. "There will never in this country be a Communist Government," he said, "and for this reason, that no gospel founded on hate will ever seize the hearts of our people—the people of Great Britain. It is no good trying to cure the world by spreading out oceans of bloodshed. It is no good trying to cure the world by repeating that pentasyllabic French derivative, 'Proletariat.' The English language is the richest in the world in thought. The English language is the richest in the world in monosyllables. Four words, of one syllable each, are words which contain salvation for this country and for the whole world, and they are 'Faith,' 'Hope,' 'Love,' and 'Work.' No Government in this country to-day, which has not faith in the people, hope in the future, love for its fellow-men, and which will not work and work and work, will ever bring this country through into better days and better times, or will ever bring Europe through or the world through." When he sat down a thrill ran through the whole House.

In April he introduced his first Budget. Three weeks before doing so, after an afternoon spent in watching the Boat Race, he was the guest of

the Press Club at its annual dinner—"an invitation," as he described it, "from a number of working men who loved their jobs to a working man who loved his job." "As Chancellor of the Exchequer," he explained, "he was being hustled like the hart upon the mountain side. Like Charles II, who walked six miles an hour to escape from asking faces, he was always walking at six miles an hour through the lobbies to escape the footfalls of those who wanted to tell him how to redeem the debt and what taxes to remit. He had, of course, received a good deal of help from the Press. He had also learnt a great deal from Sir Eric Geddes. He would say this about Sir Eric. Just as middle-aged men, when they took to themselves young wives, were always the most uxorious and amorous, so Sir Eric Geddes, having passed her by for the better part of his life-time, had become enamoured of the emaciated figure of economy." It was a shrewd cut, for the conversion of the great men of the Coalition to economy had been notoriously late and sudden.

Thereafter, amid continuous laughter, this astonishing Chancellor proceeded to forecast his Budget. "He was very anxious to have what might be called a popular budget. He was no believer in brilliancy or imagination in finance. There had been too much of that in the last year, and one of the most brilliant and imaginative financiers was now doing time. It was quite possible that before the year was gone he might

be joined by others. He was therefore not going to try to be imaginative or ambitious, but merely popular.

“It had been suggested that twopence should be taken off beer. Threepence would be better. Tobacco, especially when one considered the atmosphere of the room, ought to be brought down considerably. The war-duty on sparkling wines ought to go. He did not feel inclined to touch the super-tax because it did not concern the company—although he might possibly put a shilling on it. Income tax might be brought down by half. As he came from a cider growing county the duty on that beverage, which brought in very little, must go, but they must double the duty on aerated waters. He had never been in favour of cheap-hiccoughs. Some of these things could be done by suspending the Sinking Fund, funding pensions and telling America that we were quite incapable of meeting our Debt charges. It would be a popular budget, supported by the Press, and what more could a man want? It would be something to go to the country on, and the Government might or might not come back. If they did not, it might be a little difficult for his successor, but it was not his duty to consider him.” He ended by saying that as they had received his suggestions so warmly, he would go down to Chequers for the Easter holiday and write a most powerful Budget that would be a triumph in the House of Commons and justify his return to the office which he had filled with

such distinction for an indefinite number of years.<sup>1</sup> After all the solemn pomposities of war-time and post-war political oratory, there was something very reassuring about a man who spoke disrespectfully of his own Budget. And, in the tradition of an earlier England, he taught by jest.

The real Budget, introduced on 16th April, was less spectacular. The Chancellor rose at 4.13 and sat down at 5.33. He took less time over it than any of his predecessors had done for the past half century, though he was dealing with accounts totalling over eight hundred millions on each side of the national ledger. He devoted an unexpected surplus of a hundred millions to the redemption of debt, and then, with a bold determination to restore confidence to a struggling and despondent nation, took 6d. off the 6s. income tax and a penny off beer.

In the same month that his Chancellor of the Exchequer presented his first Budget, Bonar Law consulted his physicians. From them he learnt what he already knew, that his end was in sight and that he could carry his burden no longer. He made up his mind to resign immediately. He was pressed to nominate his successor, but refused: he felt he could take no further responsibility.

The obvious successor to the leadership of the Party and the Premiership was the Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, whose experience of

<sup>1</sup> *Morning Post*, 26th March, 1923.

high office extended for a quarter of a century. But for all his great abilities and very real public devotion, he was not popular. Moreover he was a member of the House of Lords, and with the Labour Party now leading the Opposition, his appointment as Prime Minister might imperil the continued working of the Constitution. The only other possibility within the Government was the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Should he refuse to serve or be passed over on account of inexperience, the Conservative Party would have to submit to the leadership of those who had thrown in their fortunes with Lloyd George.

There was a little group of Conservatives, and one man in particular, who already knew Baldwin for what he was. They were convinced that he alone could lead their Party. The story of the few days that intervened between Bonar Law's sorrowful decision and the fateful Royal choice of 22nd May cannot yet be told. The greatest obstacle of all—the reluctance of a diffident man who seven months before had thought his days of modest political service over—had to be overcome in argument. The elder statesmen were sent for—one is believed to have travelled from the West by the early milk train—to tender their advice to their Sovereign. The advice was taken. Lord Curzon of Kedleston and Stanley Baldwin were summoned to the Palace, the one to be told why his long career of service in high station could not be crowned by

the highest prize of all, the other to be asked to form a government.

A man utterly unknown a year before had become Prime Minister. Not since the younger Pitt had anyone risen to that great office with such rapidity. As he stepped out of the taxi which bore him back from the Palace to No. 11, the pressmen surrounded him. "I need your prayers rather than your congratulations," he said simply, and vanished into the silence within. The suddenness of his rise rather appalled him. Till a little while before it had never occurred to him that a fellow like himself could ever attain to such an eminence. Lloyd George, Churchill, Birkenhead, Curzon, Bonar Law, Horne, Chamberlain, Balfour, all such clever men, had seemed immeasurably above him. And now they had all collapsed like a pack of cards, and here he of all people was Prime Minister. He could not help chuckling a little at the absurdity of it.

He had never planned out or schemed his life, nor sought office or a career. His only idea in politics had been one which he had inherited from his father—service to the people of his own country. It was a tradition that was in his bones, and it had led him through business and the County Council to Parliament, and now by devious strange paths to where he was. In that extraordinary moment it was difficult to escape the belief that somehow it had all been meant to happen. God sometimes chose very imperfect instruments to do his business : indeed he knew

there were no others. Looking back he saw that all the little things which he had never noticed at the time seemed to fit into the ultimate scheme of things. All that had ever happened to him was preparation for this hour.<sup>1</sup>

He had been chosen because he had a work to do, because he alone of all those in high place understood the essential need of his country. She required above all things peace and unity, a return to the basic virtues of truthfulness, integrity and good humour on which her genius had always rested. It was because he knew these things as cleverer men did not that he had struck at the colossus Lloyd George and brought him down.

Anyway the thing had come to him, and there it was. "It makes very little difference," he once said, "whether a man is driving a tram-car or sweeping streets or being Prime Minister, if he only brings to that service everything that is in him and performs it for the sake of mankind."<sup>2</sup> What had happened was obviously inevitable: it could never have happened otherwise. What was curious was that the British people immediately accepted it as inevitable too. The *Spectator* summed it up in a few sentences. "A sense of inevitability surrounds his Premiership, which would have caused amazement if it had not somehow or other come about so smoothly and so easily. And yet inevitability is too hard a

<sup>1</sup> *On England*, 15-17.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

word. . . . It was rather with the feeling with which one says : ' I have felt for years that this was what ought to happen.' ”

During the early summer of 1923 the general public was being hastily instructed by its publicists as to the past and personality of its unknown Premier. He did not give them much help. The only contribution he offered was that he would prefer a private existence in the country, where he could read the books he wanted to read, lead a decent life and keep pigs. Most Englishmen wanted to do the same. The story of his post-war sacrifice of his capital found its way into the newspapers, and from South Wales and the West tales of some of his kindnesses to his own people. But there was not much to go on. According to T. P. O'Connor he was “ a modest and a shy and a very simple man : . . . there is no more thoroughly English Englishman in the House of Commons.” He certainly seemed to dislike the limelight.

The photographers helped more. Whenever they caught him—generally with an “ Oh, well, if I must ” kind of expression on his face—he had a pipe in his hand or mouth. It was a particularly common sort of pipe : the kind of pipe the ordinary Englishman smoked. It had a tranquillising, homely and pacifying effect. Here was a politician who was scarcely a politician at all : there seemed nothing mysterious or elusive about him. His face alone was an assurance of that : it was written all over with what Burke once

called "the ancient and inbred integrity and good humour of the English people." "No foreigner," wrote one commentator, "ever had that face."<sup>1</sup> And if any further assurance was needed, there were his clothes. They were positively awful. He went to the Eton and Harrow match that summer wearing an old lounge suit and a shabby soft grey felt hat: his tie was awry, his trousers were baggy and his shoes had thick soles. The Editor of the *Tailor and Cutter* devoted a special article to his appearance: he thought that he looked suburban. The British people thought so, too, and being suburban themselves were quietly gratified. They began to get the feeling that they had known him for years. They set him down as a good, plain, honest kind of man like themselves, and were content to leave it at that.

By the end of the summer the cartoonists had got him: a solid, farmer-like sort of fellow smoking a pipe. And, though except for Lord Curzon, who magnanimously consented to remain at the Foreign Office, there was scarcely a man in his Cabinet of whom anybody had ever heard before, his Government of apprentices appeared to be doing remarkably well. The national finances seemed a little sounder, trade a little better, revolution a little less probable, and foreign affairs a little more tranquil. "Why all this fuss about the servant problem?" asked Mrs. Britannia in *Punch*. "There's my Baldwin—can turn her hand to anything, keeps the House

<sup>1</sup> A. B. Walkeley, *Still More Prejudice*, 240.

in order, checks the accounts, doesn't want any evenings off, very tactful with visitors—especially foreigners, in fact a perfect treasure.” The *Daily Chronicle*, noting that he was “humdrum,” despaired of ever getting him out of office. It need not have troubled, for before many months were over this extraordinary man was to get himself out of office.

For he did not see his task as the simple affair that it seemed to others. He might appear an ordinary fellow, but his discernment was not ordinary at all. He saw beneath the surface and knew how deep the sickness of his country went. The source of the evil was the hatred and bitterness that had risen between the classes and between man and man. When the new Labour members had assembled at Westminster in the previous winter, they had derided the hope of the respectable possessing classes for “tranquillity.” “We'll smash all this!” one of them shouted when the Commons were bidden by the Lord Chancellor, in traditional form, to repair to their own chamber and elect their Speaker. “We'll give you tranquillity!” In the early months of the year, Mr. Baldwin, leading the House, had been forced to move the closure to stop the din of the wild men from the North and the Clyde. One night in March the Scotsmen had continued their shouting till 4 a.m., while the gentle-tempered George Lansbury had called the Minister of Health the Minister of Death. And when a Tory member rose to suggest the keeping of St.

George's Day as a national holiday, a Socialist retaliated by demanding the substitution of May Day and the compulsory teaching of international history in the state schools. The division in the House was symptomatic of greater division in the country.

For the voice of Britain was no longer the voice of one nation, but of two, and their voices were ranged against one another. The evil that had been begun with the Industrial Revolution had all but culminated in civil war in the hungry 'forties. Partly bridged by the prosperity of the later Victorian era and the wise Disraelian revival of a national Conservatism, the division had again been intensified by the social and economic changes of the twentieth century. The personal tie between master and man had been broken and its place taken by the inhuman and fugitive relationship of joint stock capital and organised Labour. The old friendly spirit of neighbourhood that cut across class divisions had vanished in the new regimentation of urban society into regions inhabited almost solely by a single class, whose members grew up in ignorance of every other class. A great nation was dissolving into jealous and antagonist sections. There could only be one end to such a conflict.

All this the new Prime Minister saw clearly. His fundamental task was to make his countrymen trust one another again: till that had been achieved, he could do nothing. So long as one part of the nation, and that the greater, regarded

the other part as a gang of merciless scoundrels and exploiters living on popular misery, while the other part looked on those who reviled it as potential thieves and traitors, there could be no salvation. Somehow he had got to bring peace to a sorely tried Britain, because till he had done so neither he nor anyone else could even start to heal her wounds. And he had to do so within the forms of a democratic system: he had to persuade, for he could compel or coerce no man. To get eighty per cent of the community to live contentedly under the constitution, without squabbling and perpetually impeding one another, that was his primary objective.

Tory at heart as he was, and lover of the old ways and traditions of England, he saw clearly that the working people of the country had got to be taken into partnership—partnership of mind and intelligence. He had got to win the goodwill of Labour, to educate them, to persuade them to work inside, not outside, the constitution: to heal the body politic, not to wreck it. And he had got to educate his own Party, rooted in the idealism of the past, to accept change and be tolerant of the heresies of the other part of the nation. He had to teach it the old lesson, taught in turn by Bolingbroke, by Pitt, by Disraeli, to be true to its greatest, hardest tradition of devoting itself, not to the welfare of its own privileged supporters, but to that of the general body of the nation. In a speech made at Edinburgh that July he defined the objects of

his policy. "I have but one ambition during my term of office. I want to see that the people of this country realise the truth of what I have been attempting to express. I want them to realise that we in the Unionist Party are as anxious as anyone who speaks in the name of Socialism to do all in our power for the betterment of our people. Unionism does not mean reaction and never will. I want to see in the next year or two the beginnings of a better feeling of unity between all classes of our people. If there are those who want to fight the class war we will take up the challenge and we will beat them by the hardness of our heads and the largeness of our hearts. I want to leave this country when my term ends in better heart than it has been for years. I want to be a healer, and I believe that as these things have to be done through the instrumentality of parties, the Unionist Party is the one upon which the country must lean if it desires these ends."<sup>1</sup>

He had one asset—"an unvarying habit of being at one with his fellow men."<sup>2</sup> He had a better chance of persuading his countrymen to unity, because he had so natural a liking for unity himself. He could never see any section of the nation as a class apart: even the angry, shouting Labour men across the floor of the House were not the traitors that they seemed to his infuriated followers; they were just patriots

<sup>1</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 28th July, 1923.

<sup>2</sup> A. Gowans Whyte, *Stanley Baldwin*.

like himself trying to do their best in a mistaken way. It was for him to persuade them that they were mistaken, not by abusing them or scoring off them in debate, but by moderation and reasoning. There was no other way to restore sanity to Britain.

His task in fact was to educate. It was not going to be easy, for there was no lack of false counsellors to advocate a very different mode of behaviour to an ignorant people who had many grievances on which to play. The great mass of the nation had only been enfranchised since 1918, and it remained to be seen whether, as many people feared, the status and power of the electorate had not got ahead of its culture and political judgment. The chief enemy was ignorance, and there were plenty of clever slick men who had a vested interest under the new sovereign democracy in preying upon that ignorance and exploiting it. Speaking at the opening of a political college that autumn the Prime Minister defined the nature of his problem. "The great task of this generation, in my view, is to save democracy, to preserve it and to inspire it. The ideal of democracy is a very fine one, but no ideals can run of themselves, and if democracy is to be preserved and yield the fruits that those who believe in it would fain see, the only way it can be done is by all the individuals, according to their power, equipping themselves sufficiently to keep the whole mass sweet and true, and to preserve in their plenitude and sanity the ideals

that inspire them. I have used this figure of speech before, but I want to use it again. All government of the people can be represented, as it were, on the circumference of a wheel, and government runs in very varying degree from the most complete and absolute autocracy, step by step, to chaos, and you find instances in history of governments passing through every phase on that circumference; often autocracy will end in chaos, and chaos will, with equal infallibility, lead back once again to autocracy. Now we are at a point in that wheel and that point is Democracy, with representative government. We have to remember that the price of liberty is eternal vigilance, and I may add, eternal knowledge, eternal sympathy, and eternal understanding.”<sup>1</sup> He ended by appealing for more widespread understanding—“understanding of ourselves and understanding of our brothers and sisters—and that true understanding is the salt that savours the whole life of the community. It was never more needed than it is to-day, and those who understand will realise that there is no greater need in the world, abroad and at home, than peace, peace from the warfare of arms and peace of spirit. Those are the things I intend to fight for during the time that I am Prime Minister, whether that time be long or short.”<sup>2</sup>

It was to be very short, and by his own choice. He was the nation’s pilot, and it was not only a

<sup>1</sup> *On England*, 119.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

course to a far haven that he had to set. He was on the bridge in a storm. Trade was staggering under the successive losses of old customers and the competition of new rivals. The War had been won, but it still had to be paid for. "Our devastated areas are those in which our markets have been broken and where credit has been destroyed."<sup>1</sup> And the country was still in the trough of the depression that followed what he described as "one of the shortest, one of the most vicious and one of the most artificial trade booms that we had ever experienced." There was much reason to fear that the Budget would not balance and that the unemployment figures, already at a terrible level, might rise still further. Something was needed to help a struggling people through a time of trial and give them hope. He was more convinced than ever that some measure of protection for native industries was necessary.

At the 1922 Election, Bonar Law had given a pledge that no change would be made in the tariff system without a further appeal to the country. He had received a mandate for "tranquillity" but not for protection. As an honest man, therefore, Stanley Baldwin could do nothing in the lifetime of the existing Parliament. He took counsel of his political advisers: then, as was his wont, came to his own decision. Once it was reached, he did not hesitate for a moment. The man whom his country had learnt to think of as the most cautious and deliberate of mankind,

<sup>1</sup> *Our Inheritance*, 106.

revealed himself for the second time in one year as the most reckless when once his mind was made up. He would throw away his comfortable majority of seventy-five, dissolve Parliament and put himself on the judgment of his countrymen.

A few days before his lightning decision was announced he made a speech at Plymouth which astounded the country. "In this distressful time in the world's history, voices reach our ears from the distressed countries and the distressed peoples of the world. But the voice which is loudest in my ears is the voice of our people. It does so day and night, and I shall not shrink from my task until I have found an answer to them."

"Mr. Bonar Law's pledge given a year ago was that there should be no fundamental change in the fiscal arrangements of the country. That pledge binds me, and in this Parliament there will be no fundamental change. I take these words strictly and I am not a man to play with a pledge. . . . This unemployment problem is the crucial problem of our country. I regard it as such. If I can fight it I am willing to fight it. I cannot fight it without weapons. I have for myself come to the conclusion that owing to the conditions which exist in the world to-day, having regard to economic environment, having regard to the situation of our country, if we go on pottering along as we are we shall have grave unemployment with us to the end of time, and

I have come to the conclusion myself that the only way of fighting this subject is by protecting the home market."

The St. Crispin's Day speech at Plymouth satisfied that section of the Conservative Party that a generation before had been ready to follow Joseph Chamberlain to the death: it was greeted with shouts of "On, Stanley, on!" and "Good old Baldwin!" It did not please so much another section of the Party that believed, and as the event showed with justice, that the country as a whole still regarded Free Trade as a kind of moral talisman which it would be a national betrayal to discard. But there was to be no turning back. An immediate dissolution was announced. "Mankind is a creature," said the crusading, iconoclast Prime Minister, quoting Robert Louis Stevenson in Manchester, "who lives not by bread alone, but principally by catch-words." He imagined he could show the creature its mistake by reasoning with it. "I want to persuade my countrymen by reasoning quietly with them," he went on, "and not by a 'raging, tearing propaganda,' for which I am absolutely unsuited by nature."

"I have only one interest—to see that every effort is made to help the people of this country, people who showed magnificent qualities in the War, and whose hopes have been dashed to the ground by what has happened since—to help them to hold fast to the standard of life which has been hardly won by the toil of generations

and which is now threatened as rarely before in our history."

It almost seemed as though the most English of Prime Ministers had allowed the Celtic blood in his veins to boil over. There was a touch of Cromwell in what he did that autumn. The intensity of his faith in himself shone through what he said: there was fervour as well as conviction in his words when he addressed his own people in Worcestershire, in the course of a flying week-end campaign in his constituency.

"When I went into my garden this morning and saw the exquisite Worcestershire country, with the sun gradually dispelling the mists in the valleys and on the hills, I could not help feeling what a land this is for which to give everything one has and what a people for whom to work."

"I know enough about my fellow countrymen," he cried out, "to know they are perfectly sick of being monkeyed about by governments as they have been in the last few years."

He did not know them as well as he supposed. The good old cry of "Your food will cost you more" rallied the Liberal and Labour Parties, and the country voted against its Prime Minister's impetuous crusade. It was not a big turnover: the Conservative vote fell from 38 per cent to 37.5 per cent of the total votes cast, and the Labour and Liberal percentage rose from 29.2 and 29.1 to 30.7 and 29.9 per cent. But it was enough under the new electoral conditions of manhood suffrage

to give the Socialists and the Liberals a joint majority in the new House of 91 over the Conservatives.

The defeated Prime Minister accepted the verdict with astonishing calm. He retired, not for the last time, into a spiritual fastness of his own. When Lord Derby and Sir Archibald Salvidge, from injured, angry Free Trade Lancashire, called on him to discuss the disaster, he insisted on talking about the growing of raspberries. Nearly everybody supposed that his meteoric political career was over. "Mr. Baldwin," wrote one publicist, "will go down to history as the Prime Minister who preferred giving a hundred votes to his adversaries to postponing the realisation of his own opinion, and thus fell from power in six months. . . . Most people ascribe the tragedy to his simplicity or to bad advice. I am inclined to put it down to over-confidence in his own opinion, for I have always found that these honest people are clothed in a triple ulster of conceit." *Punch* was more generous, and held out a hand of friendly commiseration to the fallen Premier: "'Tis not in mortals to command success, but I can truly compliment you, Sir, on a clean, straight fight."

But Stanley Baldwin, though sad at heart, did not recognise himself as beaten. He had had a lesson: that was all. The British democracy needed more time to enable them to see reason than he had imagined. The evils he had hoped to cure by his unpopular remedy must remain

uncured, until such time as the people learnt to what to attribute them. He must try a new way. He neither sulked nor lost his temper, nor did he lose his courage. He waited till the new Parliament had met and the joint vote of the Liberal and Labour parties had defeated his Government. Then he resigned, and for the first time in British history a Socialist Prime Minister formed an administration.

From the more extreme sections of the Conservative Party there was a howl of anger. By his ill-considered and hasty tariff Election Baldwin had let the Socialists in. If he had listened to the advice of the old Coalitionists—men with ten times his ability and experience—and united the Conservative and Liberal vote on an anti-Socialist platform, he would have kept Labour at bay. As it was he had betrayed his country. In the organs of the cheaper Conservative Press there was a shout, presently to become familiar to tedium, that Baldwin must go.

The attack of the syndicated Press was not wholly the consequence of defeat. During the reign of Lloyd George the political power of certain great newspaper Lords had become notorious. The administration of the country had not gained either in dignity or repute by their participation in affairs, and some of their associates and subordinates had introduced an element into Downing Street that decent folk did not care to associate with the idea of a British Prime Minister. Stanley Baldwin neither sought

press publicity nor liked it, and when he became Prime Minister the double flow of inspired information and benevolent direction across the breakfast table at No. 10 abruptly ceased. Ownership of a popular Daily no longer carried with it the right to advise the Prime Minister. The Press Lords had a bone to pick with Stanley Baldwin.

But though they commanded, he did not go. He saw no reason why he should. For one thing he was an obstinate fellow, who disliked being cajoled by anybody. For another he did not believe that he had betrayed his country by letting the Socialists in. He had never supposed with the Coalitionists that they could be kept out of power for ever. If democracy was to be preserved there must be an accepted alternative to the Government of the moment. As the country had refused to try his cure—the only real one that anyone, Tory or Labour, could offer—there could not be a better time for letting the Socialists enjoy the experiment of office. They could do no great harm for they were in a minority and only kept in power by timorous Liberal votes, and they would learn a great deal from the sobering experience of responsibility.

And he was passionately anxious that they should learn that lesson. He did not like the brittle middle-class intellectuals who provided them with their shallow philosophy, but he liked the solid Trade Union men, who formed the rank and file of the Labour Party, very much

indeed. They were precisely the kind of people he understood and sympathised with: they recalled the men he had worked with in the old days at Wilden. He wanted to see them learn by experience—the only thing that he knew could teach them. And he wanted to help them.

So he gave them every chance. He refused to score clever debating points against them, which they would only regard as the unfair use of a superior education of which their birth had deprived them. He did not embarrass their leaders as he could easily have done by inflicting on them a succession of needless and ignominious defeats on minor issues. Instead he maintained a masterly impassivity. He was the most quiescent leader of Opposition the House had ever seen. A cartoonist, parodying the title of a well-known contemporary book, depicting the Silences of Colonel Baldwin—of a solid, immovable, taciturn Baldwin peacefully smoking his pipe over captions of “Exclusive picture of Mr. Baldwin about to leap in the breach and save our fair country from the ravages of Socialist rule,” “Close-up of Mr. Baldwin registering horror, hate, anger, blood-red rage, and all the other primitive passions that seethe in his turbulent bosom,” “Mr. Baldwin” (fast asleep this time with his hands folded across his middle) “preparing to deliver a masterly attack on the Chancellor and his Budget.”

In all this he showed profound political wisdom. The British people, like himself, were

at heart fair. They would have resented any attempt to harass a minority Socialist Government, making its maiden attempt to rule, as unsporting. And, set as he was on obtaining a new spirit of peace and compromise in politics, he was determined not to cause his opponents needless irritation. For the rest, he followed the sound English political rule of giving their leaders enough rope to hang themselves.

Nor was he as quiescent in the period of eclipse as he appeared to be. A distinguished writer on political subjects who was often in the House at this time has left an interesting picture of him as seen by an outside observer. The scene was the Terrace of the House of Commons: the time a spring afternoon. Two elderly members of the Labour Party were sitting silent on a bench in the foreground, smoking their pipes and resting their tired eyes on the buildings of St. Thomas's Hospital across the water.

"Presently there shot out of the same door from which they had emerged, a man who swung instantly away to the left, and with his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, his shoulders humped, and his head bent, proceeded to walk at a great pace up and down the east end of the Terrace, which is reserved for Members of Parliament.

"What little sunlight there was fell upon his sand-coloured hair and gave it a reddish look, which accentuated the yellowish pallor of his face and the colourless character of his lips and eye-

brows. A certain spruceness about him refused to harmonise with the leaden-hued stone of the Palace of Westminster. Nor was his stride in harmony with the melancholy austerity of the place ; it was the quick impatient stride of a man bent on business. Occasionally he raised his eyes and looked upwards at the packed clouds and the gulls falling through the misty air towards the river ; but for the most part he walked with his eyes on the ground.

"One of the pipe-smoking Labour members drew his companion's attention, by a prod of the elbow, to this pedestrian, who was the Conservative leader, and they both stared after him, and continued to stare after him for a long time."<sup>1</sup>

For all the while that he waited in opposition making no sign, he was impatient : waiting for the necessary time-wasting experiment to end and for a chance before it should be too late to contribute what he knew he had it in him to give to his country's future. He was already preparing for the chance. In the secrecy of Palace Chambers, across the road, he had set up his Shadow Cabinet to work out the details of the legislation he intended to pursue when he again attained power. For it was not office for its own sake that he awaited, but the execution of a policy. He had resolved to bring the Conservative Party into the van of a great national movement for a higher standard of living and a juster organisation

<sup>1</sup> A Gentleman with a Duster, *The Conservative Mind*, 16-17.

of social life. It was no good opposing Socialism with a negative policy. "It has got," he told his henchmen, "to be fought in the only way that will ever win in this country—by substituting something better in the minds of the people."

For, as he saw his task—and in those anxious days of waiting, when many of his own followers were longing to be rid of him, he thought of it incessantly—he had got somehow to wean the British people from the facile, delusive path of cheap promises and alien catch-words down which the restless Socialists Intelligentsia ("a very ugly word for a very ugly thing," as in one of his rare moments of impatience he called it) were leading them. Those who should have been the real leaders of the nation were dead—the pick of the English voluntary system who had been the first to fall because of those very qualities of leadership which had made them so ready to sacrifice themselves. Their places had been taken by the worst of their generation, by those who were not so ready. It had been a case of the survival of the unfittest. "We in England," he once said, "suffer very much from very clever physicians who are always prepared to prescribe for the body politic with a great deal of intellectual agility, which is equalled only by their ignorance of human nature."<sup>1</sup> Theirs was a certain "crystalline hardness in the soul," the result of over-education and cultivation of the intellect under conditions—only possible for a

<sup>1</sup> *Our Inheritance*, 123-4.

very sheltered class in an artificial age—which divorced them alike from nature and the soil and from the rough contacts of workaday humanity.

The ordinary Briton was saved from that fragile and foolish intellectualism by a certain obtuseness of mind and by the sentimentality that was part of his nature. But for those very reasons he was peculiarly apt in bad times to become the prey of the Intelligentsia, whose appeal was always based on a vague and rather elusive spirit of universal benevolence. To drive a wedge between them and the general working mass of the nation whom they so little understood but whom they might so easily lead to disaster, and to prevent the spark from their brittle intelligences from firing a mine of red popular discontent, was going to be a long and difficult task: it was likely to take him all his life. But he knew that no one was so well qualified to do it as he, for unlike the intellectuals he understood his own people and loved them. And he had faith in them.

It was that which sustained and inspired him. He knew how good Englishmen at their best could be—"bone good," as he loved to say. No one who knew them could really be a pessimist. "I am a believer in democracy," he said, "and a profound believer in our people and in this country. I know that if our people will face their difficulties, and bring to the facing of them the finest elements of what, when it is fine, is the finest character in the world we shall win

through.” It was a source of strength to him to think about it, as he remembered it as he had learnt to know it in his youth—its steadiness, its reliability, its personal integrity, its capacity for toleration, its quiet, humorous boredom with things.<sup>1</sup> The intellectuals were incapable of ever understanding it, for these were just the qualities that they lacked.

That May he was due to speak at the Annual Dinner of the Royal Society of St. George. He chose as his theme England and the English character. He worried a lot about that speech, and it did not come at all easily to him. Then one day, sitting by a silent piece of water during a brief holiday respite, it came to him in a flash. He wrote a passage out and showed it with diffidence to a friend. What he had written is likely to be read as long as the English tongue endures, though neither he nor those who affected to despise him were conscious of the magnitude of his literary achievement. Like Lincoln on the field of Gettysburg, he touched the heights of poetry without knowing it.

“To me, England is the country, and the country is England. And when I ask myself what I mean by England, when I think of England when I am abroad, England comes to me through my various senses—through the ear, through the eye, and through certain imperishable scents. . . .

<sup>1</sup> *Our Inheritance*, 125.

“The sounds of England, the tinkle of the hammer on the anvil in the country smithy, the corncrake on a dewy morning, the sound of the scythe against the whetstone, and the sight of a plough team coming over the brow of a hill, the sight that has been seen in England since England was a land, and may be seen in England long after the Empire has perished and every works in England has ceased to function, for centuries the one eternal sight of England. The wild anemones in the woods in April, the last load at night of hay being drawn down a lane as the twilight comes on, when you can scarcely distinguish the figures of the horses as they take it home to the farm, and above all, most subtle, most penetrating and most moving, the smell of wood smoke coming up in an autumn evening, or the smell of the scutch fires : that wood smoke that our ancestors, tens of thousands of years ago, must have caught on the air when they were coming home with the result of the day’s forage, when they were still nomads, and when they were still roaming the forests and the plains of the continent of Europe. These things strike down into the very depths of our nature, and touch chords that go back to the beginning of time and the human race, but they are chords that with every year of our life sound a deeper note in our innermost being. . . .”

During 1924 Mr. Baldwin first began to be recognised by his countrymen, at least by the

more normal and sane of them, as a speaker out of the ordinary. He spoke in words of one syllable that the man in the street and field could understand: he did not use the carefully prepared flourishes and perorations common to political rhetoricians, but seemed rather to be thinking aloud. There was a great deal of candour in what he said, and often at this time—as was almost unavoidable where truth came so naturally—a good deal of indiscretion. Later he learnt to be more careful in his public utterances: in a democratic community where a statesman's work is dependent on the feelings and good will of countless thousands, every word has to be weighed. He was at his happiest when he was speaking on subjects a little outside the course of ordinary politics.

“When we come to big things,” he once said, “we do not need rhetoric.” It was one of his merits as an orator that he so often came to big things: they were part of the air he breathed. And the other was that he used words as vehicles for thought, and not as most politicians did to save the necessity for thinking. He distrusted slogans and those “rhetorical phrases, pregnant with darkness and confused,” which were always being offered to a bemused democracy. “Rhetoric,” he told the members of the Cambridge Union, “is meant to get the vote of a division or at an election, but God help the man who tries to think on it.”<sup>1</sup> “Bulging corn bins,”

<sup>1</sup> *On England*, 75.

“self-determination,” “homes fit for heroes to live in,” “a world safe for democracy,” “the democratic control of the means of production”: once in the House he asked his opponents to translate this into literal English, but could get no answer. For the next ten years he was to fight a ding-dong battle with the priests of rhetoric for the ear of British democracy: sometimes their vague and windy promises were to prevail and sometimes, when bitter experience had proved their worthlessness, his own sober advocacy of hard fact. It was fortunate for that democracy that the advocate of the unbeguiling truth should also have been a poet who could sometimes help men to see the inner beauty that lay beneath the harsh, forbidding exterior.

His first victory in that battle came in the autumn of 1924. The nation, anxious for quick results, had already grown impatient, almost unfairly so, with the specious promises and grandiloquent claims of the Socialist Government. The quiescence of the Conservative leader, at which his followers had grumbled, was now seen to be wisdom, for the country as a whole believed that the Government, for all its minority position, had had a square deal. It therefore judged it without compunction. A General Election in October, brought about by a widespread suspicion that the Government was tampering with the course of justice and endangering the safety of the realm at the dictation of extremists, ended in a surprising victory for

the Conservatives, who gained 161 seats and returned to Westminster 413 strong—an unprecedented majority. Stanley Baldwin, who a few months before had been pityingly described as the “chief patient in the Tory convalescent home,” and whom a group of ex-Coalitionists and Party intriguers were still trying to jockey out of the leadership, as the “chief patient in the Tory convalescent home,” became the political hero of the hour. He had reunited his Party, overhauled its machinery, and, after his waiting tactics, had struck at exactly the right moment. The very restraint with which he had fought the campaign had contributed to the victory. While the Socialist Prime Minister had referred to his opponents as “mangy dogs,” Mr. Baldwin had refrained from all needless and uncharitable abuse. By doing so he had won the support of the moderate, middle kind of voter, who was attached to none of the organised parties, but who formed his political judgments by the light of common sense.

The new Prime Minister was magnanimous in his hour of victory: his intention was not to triumph over his enemies but to win them to his purposes. Three of the ex-Coalitionists now entered his Government, Mr. Winston Churchill as Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lord Birkenhead as Secretary of State for India, and Mr. Austen Chamberlain as Foreign Secretary. After two years the schism in the Conservative ranks had been healed. Then the Premier addressed him-

self to his followers. "The responsibility for progress," he told them in a speech at the Albert Hall, "rests not only on the Government, but on every man and woman in the country. The Government can go no faster in progress than the people will allow them to do. . . . The ultimate responsibility is with the people more even than with the Government. It is a testing time for democracy. Many are those who would pay, and do pay, lip service to it. But I remember that democracy is after all but the government of the people by the people through their freely elected representatives, and unless the responsibility for that government is felt throughout the length and breadth of the country, from top to bottom, by men and women alike, democracy itself will fail."

"Democracy, democratic government, calls for harder work, for higher education, for further vision than any form of government known in this world. It has not lasted long yet in the West, and it is only by those like ourselves who believe in making it a success that we can hope to see it permanent and yielding those fruits which it ought to yield. The assertion of people's rights has never yet provided that people with bread. The performance of their duties, and that alone, can lead to the successful issue of those experiments in government which we have carried further than any other people in this world. Democracy can rise to great heights; it can also sink to great depths. It is

for us so to conduct ourselves and so to educate our own people, that we may achieve the heights and avoid the depths."

"You who have just been elected to the House of Commons," he told the new Conservative members, "are, by the testimony of your fellow-countrymen, their natural leaders for the next four or five years. It is your duty to educate that great democracy of which we are all a part. . . . Don't ever lose touch with your constituency; don't ever mistake the voice of the clubman and the voice of the Pressman in London for the voice of the country. It is the country that has returned you; it is the country which will judge you."

He began the life of the new Parliament with a studiously quiet and unprovocative speech. He was little elated by his victory, for he knew the extent of the difficulties he would soon have to face. An ex-Liberal M.P. who met him in the Lobby expressed the hope that he was enjoying his position again.

"What I find about it," said Mr. Baldwin, "is that it is a whole-time job."

"I am sure you will make a great success of it."

"Time will show."

For the Prime Minister knew that he had much to do that would displease both friends and foes. Before he had been in office many months the first-fruits were seen in legislation of that policy of progressive social reconstruction which

he had planned in opposition. Pensions for widows and orphans, contributory pensions at sixty-five, a whole series of measures dealing with housing and the condition of the people were introduced, all of them carrying the inevitable price of further taxation of the well-to-do—the very element from which a Conservative Government was popularly supposed to draw its chief support. Angry Tories of the old school began to grumble; their leader was using his majority to pass Socialist legislation for which they would have to pay. The benefits he was bestowing on an undeserving and ungrateful proletariat did not even have the merit of being needful bribes to snare votes: the Election had already been won.

But the Prime Minister, who had set himself to the gigantic task of composing the angers and grievances of a discontented, uneducated, and deluded proletariat, by every dictum of the Marxist creed now ready for revolution—was not to be shaken from his purpose by the clamour of the Die Hards. He knew very well what he was about. Speaking that January to his own people at Stourport he touched on the underlying purpose of his political existence. "There is only one thing which I feel is worth giving one's whole strength to, and that is the binding together of all classes of our people in an effort to make life in this country better in every sense of the word. That is the main end and object of my life in politics."<sup>1</sup> In the spring he

<sup>1</sup> *On England*, 12-13.

gave a more remarkable indication of what he was trying to do.

One of his followers, a Scot and a lawyer, Mr. MacQuisten, was seeking to introduce a bill to end the system by which a Trade Unionist had to incur the trouble and odium of contracting out to prevent part of his union subscription being allocated to the funds of the Labour Party. Both from the Conservative point of view and from that of abstract justice, the measure was desirable, and there was much enthusiasm for it among the Tory rank and file. But the Prime Minister thought otherwise. The good that it might do his own Party, he held, was not worth the anger which it would create in the hearts of his opponents. He was not going to allow the majority he had won to be used to create bitterness.

On March 5th, 1925, the day before the second reading of the Trade Union (Political Fund) Bill, he was due to address a Conservative rally at Birmingham. He made it the occasion for a sermon on the importance of getting rid of the spirit of contention. At that time there was a great fervour in the country for international peace abroad, and for obtaining a better understanding between nations. "It is that cursed and diabolic suspicion between man and man and nation and nation," he said, "that robs Europe of that sense of security that is essential to the unity of spirit which we must have before the world can function aright. . . . Far more do I

plead for disarmament at home, and for the removal of that suspicion that tends to poison the relations of man and man, the removal of which alone can lead us to stability for our struggling industry, and create the confidence in which our people may be able to move forward to better things. . . . Why must we reserve all our talk of peace and our prayers for peace for the Continent, and forget to have our talks and our prayers for peace at home? It is one of the paradoxes of public life that from the very lips which preach pacifism abroad we hear the cries for war at home.”<sup>1</sup>

A truce was needed if only to enable the nation to live. All the preaching of class hatred and revolution that was going on was merely endangering instead of improving the national standard of living. It was already perilously low: there were a million and a quarter unemployed on the registers, coal exports had just dropped by eighteen million tons, and one in five of those who had formerly earned their living in the heavy industries were out of work. These things could not be remedied by talking about imaginary Utopias. “There may be a better industrial system imaginable than ours, and I hope indeed we may be slowly moving towards something better; but there is no doubt in my mind that if it were possible to destroy the present system in a moment, those who destroyed it would cause

<sup>1</sup> *On England*, 21, 25-6.

a shipwreck, and they would not bring into being a ship in which to take away the survivors.”<sup>1</sup> The only hope for the country was a return to the old way of reconstruction by agreement and co-operation. That, if the people would but see it, was where their peculiar genius lay. “The power of managing our own affairs in our own way is the greatest gift of Englishmen.”

Next day, in the House of Commons, the Prime Minister transferred the sermon to his own followers. In an extraordinary speech he spoke of the necessity of settling the problems of industry by co-operation between the representatives of organised Capital and organised Labour, reinforcing it by homely illustrations drawn from his own experience as an employer. “Surely,” he said, “it is plain that the only progress that can be obtained in this country is by those two bodies of men—so similar in their strength and so similar in their weaknesses—learning to understand each other and not to fight each other.”

He ended by turning to the Conservative benches and appealing to them to drop the measure. “We find ourselves, after these two years, in power, in possession of perhaps the greatest majority our Party has ever had, and with the general assent of the country. Now how did we get there? It was not by promising to bring this Bill in; it was because, rightly or wrongly, we succeeded in creating an impression

<sup>1</sup> *On England*, 30-1.

throughout the country that we stood for stable Government and for peace between all classes of the community. . . .

"I want my Party to-day to make a gesture to the country of a similar nature, and to say to them: 'We have our majority; we believe in the justice of this Bill which has been brought in to-day, but we are going to withdraw our hand, and we are not going to push our political advantage home at a moment like this. Suspicion which has prevented stability in Europe is the one poison that is preventing stability at home, and we offer the country to-day this: We, at any rate, are not going to fire the first shot. We stand for peace. We stand for the removal of suspicion in the country. We want to create an atmosphere, a new atmosphere in a new Parliament for a new age, in which the people can come together. We abandon what we have laid our hands to. We know we may be called cowards for doing it. We know we may be told that we have gone back on our principles. But we believe we know what, at this moment, the country wants, and we believe it is for us in our strength to do what no other party can do at this moment, and to say that we, at any rate, stand for peace.'" When he sat down the House, deeply moved, reversed its policy at his bidding. The Government's amendment, shelving Mr. MacQuisten's measure, was passed by 325 votes to 153.

The country, when it read about the debate,

was moved too. People felt that party politics had been raised to a higher level. A few captious critics among the intelligentsia, who neither liked nor understood what the Prime Minister was trying to achieve, spoke sneeringly of him as a revivalist. A week later, in another speech at Leeds, he cheerfully admitted the charge. "I have been called," he said, "a Revivalist. And I am a Revivalist, because I am in favour of a revival of trade and a revival of that good feeling amongst mankind that ought never to be allowed to fail. . . . Nothing that I have said recently has been new teaching, so far as I am concerned. But it attracts attention from the fact that I am Prime Minister. So long as I occupy that office I shall go on preaching the gospel that I have preached in a humbler sphere all my life, in the hope that before I die my fellow-countrymen and women may embrace it. The dominant issues in the world to-day are peace or concealed war. It is the same abroad as at home." And he ended by claiming that his Party would ultimately achieve what it was trying to do because its principles were in closer accord with the character and traditions of the British people than the traditions and principles of violence.<sup>1</sup>

But the road he had to travel remained a longer one than he had supposed. All the first spring and summer of his second administration, trouble was blowing up in the coal-fields, where, after a

<sup>1</sup> *Peace and Goodwill in Industry* (George Allen & Unwin), 52-78.

temporary recovery, the state of the export trade was going from bad to worse. In June the owners, faced by ruin, gave a month's notice to terminate the wages agreements which had been made in good times and were no longer tenable in bad. The miners, faced by wages incompatible with the nature of their hazardous calling, refused to contemplate the reductions demanded. Their leaders, relying on the implied promise of the hotheads of the T.U.C. that the whole Trade Union movement would come out in their aid, prepared for a national strike.

In such a situation, where the loss of foreign customers threatened the owners with ruin and the miners with semi-starvation or unemployment, it was difficult to find a *modus vivendi*. The character of those who controlled negotiations on behalf of the owners and miners made it infinitely more difficult. In Mr. A. J. Cook, the Miners' Secretary, that "humble follower of Lenin" as he liked to call himself, and in those who in their kind matched his stubborn attributes on the other side, the Prime Minister was confronted with precisely that sort of bitter and suicidal attitude that he was striving so hard to exorcise.

It soon became clear from the unyielding attitude of both parties that peace in the coal-fields could only be obtained at the price of the nation's paying the difference between what the industry earned and what those who worked in the industry demanded as their due. The expedient of subsidising the coal trade out of taxes

had been tried before under the Coalition: it had not been a success, and at best could only be regarded as a temporary measure. But that June the Prime Minister, indulging once again in his candid but embarrassing habit of thinking aloud, had asked the House of Commons "to examine and consider, as the Government are proposing to do, whether any form of subsidy may be possible to give . . . that stimulus and lift in the region of those industries which seem at the moment beaten down into a position of helplessness." In a private individual such soliloquising aloud would have been harmless; in a Prime Minister it had consequences. He had still to master a lesson of statecraft very hard for a modest man to learn.

There was an immediate clamour both from mine-owners and miners for a subsidy. The Prime Minister, pursuing his thoughts slowly and thoroughly to their logical conclusion, decided that no permanent good could be effected by a subsidy and that the coal trade, having failed once to save itself by external and artificial help, must look to itself alone for its salvation. Then at the end of July it became clear that, despite all common sense, the nation was to be confronted not merely with a stoppage in the coal-fields, but with a General Strike called by the T.U.C. to enforce its will on the Government. In other words the T.U.C., not Parliament, was to resolve how the nation's money was to be spent.

The sword of Damocles which had been threatening the country ever since 1921 was to fall at last: organised Labour was going to cross swords with the legally constituted Government of the country. If by any means that issue could be averted, the Prime Minister wished to avert it: if it had to come, he wished to see the nation ready to meet it. He made up his mind to swallow his pride and temporise. On the last day of July, confronting the uncompromising representatives of owners and miners at the Ministry of Labour, the tired Prime Minister pulled his pipe out of his pocket, filled it and observed: "Let's smoke, shall we?" A few minutes later he unfolded his plan of a nine months' subsidy while a Royal Commission made recommendations for the future of the industry. Till that time the mine-owners should pay the new rates and the miners receive their old wages, the difference being made good out of the pockets of the taxpayer, direct and indirect.

That "temporary buffer" of Subsidy and Inquiry, accepted by the owners and miners, was received without enthusiasm in the House. It was thought that the Premier had shown weakness. He had foreseen that that would be said of him: "I was not unaware of the criticism to which we should expose ourselves," he told the House. "I have heard it said that I was a coward. It is a very much easier thing to be rattled into a fight than to be rattled into peace."

He ended on a note of warning, which con-

tained a prophecy. "Let me say this in conclusion. It is a matter of will, and, just as the will to peace can bring peace, so the will to strife can bring strife. If the will to strife should overcome the will to peace temporarily—and it would only be temporarily in this country—and if we were again confronted with a challenge of the nature I have described, let me say that no minority in a free country has ever yet coerced the whole community. The community will always protect itself, for the community must be fed, and it will see that it gets its food. And let me say this too: I am convinced that, if the time should come when the community has to protect itself, with the full strength of the Government behind it, the community will do so, and the response of the community will astonish the forces of anarchy throughout the world."<sup>1</sup> At the end of that long and strained session his prophetic words passed almost unnoticed.

Once again he returned to his old attitude of waiting. He was ready to wait so long as there was any chance of getting a compromise. Meanwhile he prepared for what he now knew to be inevitable if that compromise could not be secured. Throughout the winter of 1925-6 the Government proceeded quietly with their plans to meet a threat to the vital services of the community.

In March, 1926, the Royal Commission, presided over by an independent Liberal who

<sup>1</sup> A. Gowans Whyte, *Stanley Baldwin* (Chapman & Hall), 148-9.

could not be accused of sympathising either with the coal-owners or the Government, presented its Report. It found that three-quarters of the coal mined was being produced at a loss. Its recommendations included the reorganisation of the industry, the elimination by State purchase of the royalty owners, and a limited reduction of wages. It rejected all idea of a further subsidy. The Government thought it over for a fortnight, then announced that though it did not agree with all its recommendations, it proposed to accept the Report as a whole and do its best to put it into immediate operation, provided that the owners and miners would agree to do the same.

But the miners were adamant. Their cry of "Not a cent off the pay, not a minute on the day," was the heroic embodiment of the spirit of unlistening conflict against which the Prime Minister had to wrestle. On 1st May, in order to force the Government to grant a further subsidy—for without that a fall of wages or an increase of hours was economically inevitable—it resolved to call a General Strike of vital industries on May 3rd.

There are plenty of men who when a decision has to be made will cling obstinately and without compromise to their own beliefs, so long as the evil which that decision entails is not immediately before them. Such obstinacy is sometimes called strength, but it is not strength at all, for it is based on weakness of imagination. Of such obstinacy Mr. Baldwin had shown no trace. Till now he had been ready to compromise, not

because he was weak but because he had the vision to foresee all that failure to compromise would entail. Yet when most men are brought face to face with an issue that confronts them with immediate peril and loss, they will usually be found ready to yield almost indefinitely to avert it. The Prime Minister was made in a firmer mould. Now when compromise had proved unavailing, he faced the issue squarely. At a cost of twenty-four millions to the taxpayer, he had given the Coal Industry a chance to compose its differences. It had failed. The T.U.C. were now again demanding that the legally constituted representatives of the people should obey the commands of a private association representing only a section of the people. The attempt to establish Socialism through the ballot box having failed, it was to be imposed by force. He would accept that challenge.

Others, who had been adamant when the trouble was far away, were now for compromising : he not. When on the evening of May 2nd, the printers of the *Daily Mail*, under the direction of their Union, refused to set up the leading article on the crisis, the Prime Minister virtually put the key of the council chamber in his pocket and went home. He would negotiate no further until the General Strike had been defeated. There was only one authority vested by law with the control of the people's money, and so long as he was responsible for its direction there would

be no other. He had given the apostles of Direct Action all the rope they needed: they must now go hang themselves.

He told a tense House next day of his failure: for failure it was for the time being of all his hopes of peace and goodwill. "I know that I shall be told, 'This is the end of all your dreamy visionary speeches about peace and all that kind of thing.' Let me say this: I have worked for two years to the utmost of my ability in one direction. I have failed so far. Everything that I care for is being smashed to bits at this moment. That does not take away from me either my faith or my courage. We may in this House to-day be full of strife. Before long, the angel of peace, with healing in his wings, will be among us again, and when he comes let us be there to meet him. I shall start again, and I may not see what I have dreamed of in my lifetime, but I know that the seed I have tried to plant in men's hearts these two years is germinating. I know it is germinating in the hearts and minds of men, and it is in that direction, and that direction alone, that we shall pass, after much suffering, through deep waters, and through storms, to the better land for which we hope."

Then he sat down to await the inevitable—successful revolution or the victory of the legally constituted forces of democracy. He had little doubt in his own mind of the issue. He had done all that he could to make victory as easy as

possible : the emergency organisation for maintaining essential services prepared during the winter was ready. The rest he could leave safely to the British people. They were not a raw and untried race, and he knew that the long centuries of discipline and voluntary co-operation would tell.

The sequel astonished the world. The orgy of riot and revolution which foreign observers had predicted did not follow. By waiting as long as he could, and only turning to fight when every other means but surrender had been tried, the Prime Minister had secured an almost unanimous decision from the bulk of the people. Not since the day when Elizabeth broke the rising of the northern Earls had anything quite like it been seen in England. Every day the forces behind the Government became stronger and more cheerful, and those against it weaker, more sullen and more despondent. By the end of the week the roads and railways were full of traffic, and the issue was no longer in any doubt.

But the Prime Minister was not thinking of victory, he was thinking of peace. On the main issue he would not yield an inch : it was his duty to prove that the will of the people, as expressed through its legally elected representatives, was absolute and could not be overridden by any outside body. If he failed in that, even by an iota, the whole battle would have to be fought again. But he would pay no heed to those who wanted to take drastic steps, make arrests, and

wage open war on a section of the people. Unlike Cromwell, he did not believe in government by soldiers.

On the Saturday night, five days after the strike began, in a firm steady voice perfectly suited to the microphone, he broadcasted a message to the nation. It ended on a note of blended strength and gentleness.

"This is the Government position—the General Strike must be called off absolutely and without reserve. The mining industry dispute can then be settled. This is a fair arrangement, and it would be a thousand times better to accept it than to continue a struggle which can only increase misery and disaster the longer it lasts. A solution is within the grasp of the nation the instant that the Trade Union leaders are willing to abandon the General Strike.

"I am a man of peace. I am longing and working and praying for peace, but I will not surrender the safety and the security of the British Constitution. You placed me in power eighteen months ago by the largest majority accorded to any party for many, many years. Have I done anything to forfeit that confidence? Cannot you trust me to ensure a square deal to secure even justice between man and man?"<sup>1</sup>

Down in the West at Kidderminster, an agitator hobnobbing with a striker from the

<sup>1</sup> *British Gazette*, 10th May, 1926.

works at Wilden, who was cheerfully obeying the orders of his Union, ventured to disparage the Prime Minister. To his bewilderment he found himself felled to the pavement.

On the ninth day the General Strike was unconditionally called off. The Government had won all along the line. The people was the Government and the Government was the people. That evening also the Prime Minister came again to the microphone.

“Our whole duty at the moment is to forget all recrimination. Let employers act with generosity and workers put their whole hearts loyally into their work. Waste no time in determining the share of the blame for anything. Let us set England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland going again. Employers’ associations and trade unions should meet without delay to adjust the many difficult questions which are bound to arise. The elements in our population who do not desire to see the country grow and prosper under a democratic constitution are negligible. Let us neglect them; but let the rest of us, men and women alike, whatever view we take of the recent disorder, bind ourselves in a spirit of true comradeship to preserve, develop, and maintain the industries of this country, upon which the fortunes of its citizens so vitally depend.”

## CHAPTER IV

### THE LEADERSHIP OF FAITH AND CHARACTER

“Not only was he a great Preacher but he resolutely advocated unity, peace and concord in a stormy and divided age.”

*Inscription under Richard Baxter's statue at Kidderminster.*

THE end of the General Strike saw the Prime Minister's reputation standing higher than that of any Englishman since the death of Gladstone. He had saved his country in her hour of peril, and had done so without bloodshed, by virtue of some mysterious alchemy of character and good humour. His spiritual home, wrote *The Times*, was the last ditch. But neither men nor nations can live for long in the last ditch, however well they may acquit themselves in that uncomfortable position. The end of the Coal Strike came more than six months after the General Strike. It did not see the Prime Minister's reputation standing particularly high. It had cost the nation untold wealth, nearly half its coal export trade and a dismal increase in unemployment. It was felt that the Government, by utilising the great position which it had held after its victory in May, might have done something to bring the long, tragic, useless battle of the miners against fate to an earlier end.

But that was precisely what a democratic Government could not easily do, and a Govern-

ment led by Mr. Baldwin least of all. It is the essence of a true democracy that its leaders scrupulously refrain from compelling or coercing: and it was the essence of Mr. Baldwin's conception of statesmanship that opinion could only be formed by giving it time to learn its lessons from experience. It was his consistent belief that there was no such thing as a short cut. The lesson of the Coal Strike was that if men wish to live under a democracy they must seek out their own salvation and not look to the State for it. Under certain forms of government the State may offer salvation of a kind, but it has to be paid for in a permanent loss of freedom by the individual. For wherever the State comes to save, it remains to enslave.

There was another lesson men had to learn from the Coal Strike. It was an illustration of what the spirit of bitterness and hatred can accomplish in the world. All unknowingly the *intransigent* representatives of the owners and miners taught by contraries the truth that Stanley Baldwin was trying to teach his countrymen. The resolve to distrust and think ill of one's opponents ended only in conflict. And conflict in industry was as expensive as it had been on the battlefield. In such strife there were no victors: only the hungry, the hurt and the destitute. The price of such a lesson was a heavy one, and the whole nation had to pay it. It threw back the chances of permanent economic and industrial recovery for half a dozen years.

Yet, had the nation been less wisely and patiently led, the price of past bitterness and hatred might have been far heavier. It might have been such a one as Spain is paying at this hour.

For the rest the Prime Minister had to start again. "Time after time you will find your work destroyed," he told the boys of his old school that June; "you will find your best efforts misunderstood and you will be derided; and yet, in spite of all that, you know perfectly well there is nothing for it but to go on in faith if you mean to accomplish anything. You cannot hope, and perhaps you ought not to hope, to see in your lifetime the result of your work."<sup>1</sup> The struggle to achieve peace in the country was going to be a long one and he would probably not live to see the end of it.

His difficulty was that what he was trying to do required time to be judged and appreciated. It was quite unspectacular. To make conditions a little better for everybody, and particularly for the working masses, without damaging the delicate organism of trade and individual initiative by which the nation earned its livelihood; to educate opinion to tell gold from dross; to refrain from every word and argument, however telling, that might increase the sum total of bitterness: these were not easy aims for a statesman to pursue. They required infinite patience and restraint. They were particularly difficult in an age when men could no longer apply the acid

<sup>1</sup> *Our Inheritance*, 5.

test of personal knowledge to their leaders. In the vast over-populated, under-educated communities of the modern world, a man did not need to be "bone good" to win the ear of the people: he only needed to be noisy. And even if time always laid bare the pretensions of the demagogue in the end, there would always be plenty of brazen-throated knaves and fools clamorous to mount the same rostrum.

All this he knew very well. No man in politics, least of all in those of a democratic state, could ever hope to achieve his full desire or accomplish more than a fraction of what he set out to do. Before he could do anything at all a whole nation, or at least more than half a nation, had to be convinced that what he was doing was right. It was not the least use being right oneself if one did not do that as well. And of that nation, human nature being what it is, a considerable portion must necessarily be fools and an even greater proportion ignorant of the political data on which they were constantly being asked to decide. With men having to earn their own living, in a world in which the fields of crowded specialised knowledge widened every day, it could not easily be otherwise.

It was not only folly that the democratic leader had to combat. There was plenty of knavery and self-interest, and plenty of clever folk who had a vested interest in popular ignorance. Such men were no friends to a Prime Minister who desired office not for

its own sake, but in order to teach people to think for themselves.

And even when he had persuaded one-half of the nation—that which gave him his numerical majority in the House—that a certain course of action was desirable, he still had to convince the other. For, whatever it might be to the ordinary politician, it was not enough in his eyes to carry a policy, however right, through the lobbies, if by doing so the breach between the two halves of the nation became widened. He was not legislating for an ordinary age or a homogeneous people, but for a radical and revolutionary era and for an electorate whom the mistakes of the past had almost divided into two separate and warring nations. Some of his own followers, though as a whole they supported him with a wonderful loyalty, forgot that and criticised him because he did not use the majority they had given him to carry measures which would have pleased them but infuriated those whom they regarded as their opponents. Yet he had to do his work by their help and through the agency of an historic political party whose principles and prejudices had to be considered. His instrument, the only one available to a statesman in a parliamentary country, was a parliamentary party. His critics on the other side forgot that.

And all the while, as he tried to fashion policies and put ideals into concrete fact, he had to deal with people. The raw materials of his

trade were human beings, with all their capacity for error, for hurt feelings, for misunderstanding, with their selfish interests, their gallant illogical ideals. "Your instruments by which you work," he once told a gathering of artists, comparing their trade with that of the politicians, "are dumb—pencils and paints. Ours are neither dumb nor inert. I often think that we rather resemble Alice in Wonderland, who tried to play croquet with a flamingo instead of a mallet."<sup>1</sup> For every step he took forward, he was usually compelled to take the greater part of a step back, and sometimes more than a step.

Yet it was a man's work, and it was worth doing. He loved to read the epic of his old friend, F. S. Oliver, the tale of Walpole's *Endless Adventure* in the great art of governing men, not by coercion but by tact, persuasion and understanding. It made it easier if one happened to like them. He was fortunate in that he did like his fellow creatures: indeed he loved them for their very faults. When they were particularly obstinate and difficult he recalled the kindly, rustic school where he had learnt to know them—the self-same one in which the delineator of Mr. Justice Shallow and Bottom the Weaver had first been taught the lesson of humanity. Once, when the House was being particularly fractious, the Premier whispered into the ear of the Chancellor of the Exchequer at his side the saying of an old Worcestershire drover,

<sup>1</sup> *On England*, 110.

encountered forty years before driving pigs to market: "A hard thing to drive many on 'em, very, is a pig."<sup>1</sup>

Underneath the skin he was still a humorist and a poet, and, as the years went by, he did not become less, but more so. "There is one compensation in the life of a Prime Minister," he said, "that periodically he is sent out from London to make speeches in the country-side." Sometimes he was allowed to leave his deadening, dry-as-dust task for a few hours, to speak on some subject unconnected with politics where he could give his fancy free play. On these occasions men noticed in their unaccountable Prime Minister a genius for dry, human, revealing wit; "we think the most suitable place to crow is at the Poultry Congress," he told one gathering, and the National Institute for Industrial Psychology were informed with a twinkle that the League of Nations was confronted by two grave obstacles—"the prejudice of people who think it can do nothing and the support of people who think it can do everything." Unveiling the Hudson Memorial in Hyde Park he explained that there were three classes which were in particular need of sanctuaries: birds, flowers, and Prime Ministers. And he loved to tell the story of the lady who asked at the beginning of his first term of office: "Is the new Prime Minister what you would call an educated man?"

He never forgot that men and women were

<sup>1</sup> *This Torch of Freedom*, 123.

individual human beings, never made the mistake common to most of those who govern the numerical masses of the modern world of thinking of them as the raw material of statistics. "One is not working," he once said, "for any kind of abstraction or any large party of voters, but the human men and women who are carrying on the daily toil of the world, with whom one has worked oneself and whom one has known on terms of intimacy. It is a great strength and a great help." "Often I have talked of democracy," he observed on another occasion. "Political democracy is but a means to an end. The true democracy after which we all strive is an enjoyment in which there may be made common the enjoyment of wealth in its highest sense of well-being, of culture, and of leisure. That is the ideal to which we are moving all too slowly; but if there be a right cause of discontent in the hearts of men, it is not that one man envies another because he has more motor-cars, but because of that feeling, ineradicable in the heart of man, that there is something unfair in there being but a partial allocation of the discoveries of the human mind and the genius of the human soul in the arts—and that the achievements of the human spirit should be shared, and shared by all alike. Poetry and music are, thank God, the common heritage of your people. Keep the standards high and keep your grip on the soul of democracy, for without a soul even democracy will make men as the beasts of the

field that perish. The culture of the things that you cultivate is like the air. The possession of that culture robs no man, but it enriches everyone who partakes of it.”<sup>1</sup>

Like the great President from the Middle West, whom in certain respects he resembled, Mr. Baldwin was something more than a national leader. For he was also the national bard. He had a curious capacity for summarising in a speech, not what everyone was thinking—English people, particularly of the cleverer sort thought some very foolish things in the nineteen-twenties—but something that went far deeper, what everyone was feeling. He did what Poet-Laureates are supposed to do. His valedictions to Lord Curzon and Bonar Law are examples of this: perhaps even better was his appeal for funds for restoring Westminster Abbey:

“It is hard for us to realise the Westminster of the thirteenth century. Where the omnibuses swing round by St. Margaret’s Church and along that busy road to Lambeth Bridge, Henry III, the founder of the Abbey as we know it, planted an orchard of pear trees that he might see the white walls rising through the blossom as he watched his masons at work from his palace in the spring. The monastery is gone, but the Abbey is ours, darkened with age, with a beauty against which Time is powerless, the spectator of six centuries of

<sup>1</sup> *This Torch of Freedom*, 195–6.

ceaseless striving, of splendid successes, of splendid failures, of dreams and of achievement. By her altar our kings have been crowned ; under her roof we have given thanks for our victories ; under her roof we have mourned our dead.”<sup>1</sup>

When his first volume of speeches was published in 1926, it ran through six editions in a year. Political speeches are usually harder to sell than any other species of literature.

The virtues that made the Prime Minister so universal a statesman, sometimes caused men in the daily hurly-burly of politics to think that he was not fit to be a statesman at all. He was a poet with the acute perception of a poet, and the price of perception is sensitiveness. In the growing centralisation, which he detested, of the modern political system, he had to carry a burden of work which would have weighed down the most insensitive of men. He was at everybody's beck and call : at every moment of the day some new problem was arising which he would sooner or later be called upon to solve. What might have been tolerable to a very unfeeling and obtuse man was a constant menace to the nervous system of a man of fine susceptibilities.

His protection of his own vitality and sanity of judgment was probably unconscious. But he had a great work to do and the faith that was in

<sup>1</sup> *Our Inheritance*, 27-8.

him taught him to save himself for its doing. In the conditions of our modern administrative system there is no one but himself to protect a Prime Minister from a strain greater than any human being can bear. How great that strain was became apparent after a few years of office : those watching the Prime Minister, physically one of the strongest of men, deliver his speeches, noticed a curious and disconcerting habit of facial distortion : his features would twitch and he would seem at times to make grimaces at his audiences as though in pain. In their different ways Abraham Lincoln and Samuel Johnson suffered from similar disabilities : they are the scars which a very sensitive man who has made himself a very strong man carries with him as a price of his strength. Those who knew the Prime Minister were sometimes pained to see what a toll the strain of the day's business took of his fine vitality. " I always eat my breakfast," he once said, half in humour, half in earnest. " Every morning I am full of hope, faith, and cheer. By lunchtime I've lost a great deal of it, and by evening I've given up all hope of this world and the next." A man who gets his greatest happiness from listening to the music of Schubert, reading the classical poets and gazing on the English landscape, has to undergo a great deal if he essays to carry the burden and face the wounding arrows of political life.

With the growth of political experience the Prime Minister unconsciously evolved a kind of

technique of self-protection. He developed a habit, occasionally maddening to those who had to transact business with him, of putting off minor decisions and of refusing to look into unpleasant matters that needed his attention. Like Charles II he learnt the art of walking away from asking faces : it was as well, for he was surrounded by them. Being one of the best listeners in the world helped him here a great deal. He would sit through a long argument and say absolutely nothing. On such occasions a curious wooden and impressive expression would come over his face : he looked like a man playing poker. And when his informant had gone away, he would put the subject in some quiet corner of his mind and leave it there. Sometimes he seemed to be going to leave it there for ever.

This refusal to look into minor questions of business arose, not only out of an unconscious necessity of self-protection, but from a conscious sense that the business of government should not become more centralised than it need be. The quick Celtic genius and all-pervading energy of Lloyd George had left a difficult legacy to his successors in the Premiership : the monopoly of business which he had sought and sustained killed Bonar Law and prematurely aged Mr. Ramsay MacDonald. It neither killed nor aged Stanley Baldwin : after three terms of office, his mind to-day is as vigorous as it has ever been in his life. It is so partly from his very refusal to under-

take anything which might conceivably be undertaken by subordinates in their respective Departments. He once attributed the reserve of strength, with which he astonished his critics and friends alike in the hours of crisis, to the fact that he was a very lazy man. He was not, but he knew how to save himself. He took care to do so.

It was his habit to trust people. Ever since he had first entered business in Worcestershire, it had been his practice to leave his subordinates alone to get their work done in their own way. He only asked for results, and believed that he was more likely to get them by not interfering. It was all part of his deep-seated sense of democracy: he really believed in the ordinary man. During the four and a half years of his second administration it seemed to outsiders that he included some very ordinary men in his Cabinet. They sometimes made grave mistakes. The Prime Minister's patience with them imposed a strain on the temper of those less patient and brought him a good deal of criticism. And even when he was forced to do an unpleasant thing and bring an erring colleague to book, he was apt to put it off as long as he possibly could. He sometimes carried forbearance almost to the point of vice. He lacked the virtues as well as the failings of the administrative mind.

For all his long experience of great place he remained curiously diffident of his own powers. "Some of my colleagues," he once said, "think I am a half wit; others doubt whether I am even

a quarter wit." Most men are apt to have their heads turned by power and grow to think themselves infallible: Stanley Baldwin was never in any danger of doing so. His temptation was the opposite: for all his tremendous reserves of inner strength, he was apt to allow his own better judgment in minor matters to be overruled by those of inferior mind.

It was this, rather than inertia, that caused him at times to delay so long in taking action. His mind, quick as lightning in friendly talk and repartee, moved to a decision with the slowness of the seasons. Trust in others, lack of confidence in his own judgment over little things, an unconscious resolve to protect himself from unnecessary strain, and a mind and heart too big to delight in the small change of politics, all contributed to this dilatory habit. Yet in the end his very procrastination enhanced his power. Again and again, in great issues, he proved right where quicker and less patient minds proved wrong. It is a curious commentary that in almost every major question of his time he was in a minority. Afterwards those who were most critical of his indecision and delays acknowledged his ascendancy of judgment. For he understood better than any other man in politics the importance, when dealing with a vast and diversified public opinion, of never plucking the fruit until it was ripe to fall. When it did fall he was ready for it.

The public as yet neither understood the nature of his difficulties nor the wisdom of his ways,

and in the nature of things he was subjected to a great deal of criticism. Most of it never reached him, because, being free from the vice of vanity, he never bothered to read what people said about him. He moved little in what is for want of a better word called society; he kept entertaining hostesses at a distance, and preferred to take his relaxation in his own family. And few men can have wasted less time than he in reading the newspapers. At the hour when most of the world is blunting the edge of its appetite for fresh life over its morning paper, he was usually to be seen walking in the park. Passers-by who raised their hat to him would sometimes have been astonished could they have read his thoughts. "Blister my kidneys," he was wont to say as he walked beside the flowers at the Victoria Gate, "I see the dahlias has fruz!" In the midst of his business, he kept his imagination unsullied and an inner sanctuary of the mind where he could always find refreshment. "What I feel in the life I lead," he once observed, "is this: I think of those words, 'I have sought for peace and I have never found it save in a nook with a book.'"<sup>1</sup> When he lay in bed at Chequers and gazed at the Tudor fireplace with the firelight flickering on the ceiling, he seldom failed to picture Eustace Inglesant's body lying on the hearthrug with the knife of the Italian in him. He agreed with his cousin Rudyard Kipling in hoping that the first people he might

<sup>1</sup> *Our Inheritance*, 297.

meet in the next world would be Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen, and that afterwards he might be allowed a real good talk in a corner with Mrs. Gamp. It was not surprising that some of his fellow politicians failed to understand him.

To those who knew him better, he seemed divinely human—a “dear, sweet, simple creature,” who had never been spoilt by success or lost a grain of his essential goodness. The humanity in him was always peeping out from under the statesman. One day when his letters are collected and published the nation will realise what a wealth of imagination and humour its one-time Prime Minister possessed. He loved to scribble playful and imaginary anecdotes to his friends of the extraordinary adventures he had encountered in some hard, dry-as-dust day: sometimes he confounded the solemn by writing them on postcards. Nor did he keep the treasure of his epistolary gift only for his close friends: it was one of the unexpected charms of this extraordinary man that he wrote in his own hand to all sorts of casual and humble persons who he felt merited something better from him than a dictated letter. The Wilden School Managers, for instance, never failed to receive a holograph letter of apology for absence when their meeting came round. His secretaries recall with horror a black bag of waiting correspondence, into which from time to time he would dive and remain submerged for long periods while business waited.

In this essential simplicity of heart, and in this desire to retain the contacts with ordinary humanity which so many great men neglect to their own loss and the world's, Stanley Baldwin also resembled Lincoln. Another trait which he shared with him was his love for story telling. Often he would delight his colleagues with unexpected anecdotes. He had a peculiar gift for inventing proverbs, usually containing some pungent and useful moral. "He who sleepeth with a goat spendeth the rest of his life plucking out fleas," was one, which, ascribed in a newspaper to an Afghan origin, caused a prolonged correspondence with a number of retired colonels who wrote to point out that no such proverb had ever been heard on the Hindu Kush. Another, invented in his bath and presented unexpectedly to his secretaries one morning, consisted of a laconic caution, particularly valuable to those engaged in public life, never to stand between a dog and a lamppost.

All these were momentary escapes into a wider humanity from the ceaseless pressure of his position—"the loneliest job in the world," as he once described it. He had another escape never far from his mind: the thought of the still countryside from which he came and of the kindly folk who dwelt there. Once, on one of his visits to the West, he told them what that thought meant to him. "When I do my work in London hardly a day goes by, whether

it be in Downing Street or whether it be while sitting in Parliament, that I cannot see in the vision of my mind the hills of Malvern, and Abberley and Woodbury, the Teme Valley and the Shropshire border, and the Cathedral in Worcester. They are always here, still and constant, and I know that the people who dwell round them remain constant, too.

“All through one is sustained by the thought that when the time comes, when one is no longer able to give the whole of one’s strength and power to one’s work, and one is able to come back once more to Worcestershire, then I know that however my career may be judged by the world at large, however it may be judged in other parts of England, when I come home I shall find nothing but what I have found here all my life—constant friendship and constant affection from the people among whom I was born.”<sup>1</sup>

Every Christmas and every August he got down to them for a few days. Wearing a pair of grey flannel trousers and a very old hat he would open the local horticultural show or give away the prizes, and sometimes win one. In the year of the General Strike he gained the first award for a giant gooseberry. “It’s like Heaven to see him among us again,” said one old countrywoman. “He’s been working too hard for them as don’t deserve it.” He was every bit as pleased to see them: asking for Worcestershire tales, chatting unaffectedly with humble folk who felt

<sup>1</sup> *Our Inheritance*, 308–9.

not the slightest embarrassment in his company, and chaffing them all by name: "There I see good old Hughes, who put in the electric light for me, and as soon as he had done it, joined the Fire Brigade!" It was like a rest cure to spend an afternoon in the sun and air among them, or to attend a Worcestershire match on the Kidderminster ground: he could do, he said, with a month of watching cricket.

Every August or September he and Mrs. Baldwin would get away for a three or four weeks' rest cure at Aix-les-Bains. Here, among the hills and lakes of Savoy, he could escape from telephones and the ceaseless round of questioners and callers, and enjoy a real holiday. He did not even take a secretary with him. Armed with a cherrywood pipe and a detective story, a form of light reading in which he found increasing delight, he would take his place in the Golden Arrow express at Victoria looking "as jolly as a sandboy." Once at Aix he would turn his mind to the questions which in the rush of London he had deliberately refused to consider, pondering them in his slow, deliberate way and—walking over the hills or sitting over his coffee in the garden—reach the conclusions which proved in the end nearly always to be right.

Though many shallow critics have set down the period of his second and longest administration as a period of wasted opportunity, it saw the solution of two or three of the greatest

political questions that any Government has ever been called to settle. One was the extension of the franchise to women on the same terms as men—a bold and generous measure for which the Prime Minister was violently criticised. It was believed that in doing so he was weighing the scales heavily against his own party: that the young women of the factories would vote solid for Labour. He was too magnanimous to be swayed by such an argument: the vote had been granted to older women after the War in 1918 and there was no valid reason why they should enjoy it on less favourable terms than those given to men. So far as he was concerned government by the people had come to stay, and by that he meant all the people: not only that section of them who were expected to vote in a certain way. “I believe that a democracy is incomplete and lop-sided,” he told the Women Conservatives in the Albert Hall in 1927, “until it is representative of the whole people, and that the responsibility rests alike on men and women.”

The other major achievement of the Conservative Administration of 1924–9 was the laying of the foundation stone of the great Statute of Westminster—the most significant constitutional document of modern times. Its spirit was defined in the Report of the Committee of Inter-Imperial Relations presented in August, 1926, to the Imperial Conference over which Stanley Baldwin presided:

“Great Britain and the Dominions are autonomous communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations.”<sup>1</sup>

It was happy for the future of the Empire in these critical years when the British peoples throughout the world were discarding old constitutional forms for new, that the man who guided the destinies of its senior partner should have been of so ungrudging and generous a spirit. There was nothing of the lawyer about him. “Let us not,” he said, “be in a hurry to define. Definitions and the desire for definitions split Christendom into fragments in its early days, and it has never recovered yet.” The promise of the British Commonwealth was too good a thing to be squandered in such littleness.

He saw that promise of empire always as Rhodes saw it—not as an instrument of power, but as a human opportunity measured in terms of the individual. It was doing its great work of making more homes where men and women of the British race could transmit their priceless legacies of individual freedom, respect for law and love of peaceful co-operation, to their children’s children. “It stands,” he said in an

<sup>1</sup> *Our Inheritance*, 97.

Empire Broadcast, "in the sweep of every wind, by the wash of every sea, a witness to that which the spirit of confidence and brotherhood can accomplish in the world. It is a spiritual inheritance which we hold in trust not only for its members, but for all the nations which surround it." Here, more than anywhere else in a warring, distrustful world, the democracy in which he so ardently believed would have an opportunity of proving itself.

In the August of 1927 his faith in the future of the Empire was strengthened by a visit to Canada. He was thrilled by all he saw. "We left this country," he related afterwards, "most of us, rather tired men, with a year's hard work behind us, wearying perhaps of that spirit in Europe which has been so prevalent since the War—that spirit of hopelessness and grumbling instilled into our ears by young and old nations on this old continent. And we sped out westward, and the days rested us, until after some four or five days we came across those guardian sentinels of that great continent. The icebergs streamed down south and the fogs blew up off Newfoundland. And we passed through the ice, and we passed through the fog, and we came into that great river—the most noble highway that enters into any continent in the whole world, and suddenly there lay before us the citadel of Quebec."<sup>1</sup>

During a nineteen-day visit the Prime Minister traversed the continent, and made twenty-six

<sup>1</sup> *Our Inheritance*, 182-3.

speeches. According to Canadian testimony he always struck the right note. The poet in him enabled him to comprehend the meaning of that vast and moving vista—the Acadians thronged together in the little street of Moncton and the joy of the settler in the far West, feeling that he was ploughing where no man had ever ploughed before. When he got home he spoke of these things with a fresh hope in his heart.

“I see again the cliffs of Quebec rising above that majestic river, the great train carrying us onwards through boundless corn-fields in the Middle West, great cities standing where the pioneer’s axe once hardly made its way, limitless forests whose fringes still recede further to make way for the industry of man. One who enters Westminster Abbey and surveys the hoarded history of its thousand years cannot but feel richer from the consciousness it brings that centuries have gone to his making and that his roots are established in the ages. The Abbey is an epitome of England. One who visits Canada and sees her in the radiance and glory of her morning learns a new hope, a new security.”<sup>1</sup>

Such large matters were of the far future and beyond the narrower vision of the man in the street. When the time of that Parliament was accomplished, the Prime Minister put himself once again on the judgment of his countrymen.

<sup>1</sup> *Our Inheritance*, v–vi.

It went against him. The General Election of 1929 was probably the silliest of modern times. There was a blare of vaunting promises from the parties of the Left and an uninspired reply from that of the Right. The slogan of "Safety First" (though the next two years were to show all too clearly the literal truth of it) proved a poor reply to the reckless bribes offered to a half-educated democracy which had still to learn that in this world nothing could be obtained without sooner or later paying for it. The Labour and Liberal Parties between them polled about thirteen million votes, the Conservative Party just over eight million. Leaving aside all those greater issues on which Stanley Baldwin had deserved so well of his countrymen, his administration deserved more gratitude. Three figures are significant. Between November, 1924, and the spring of 1929, employment in insured trades had increased by nearly 600,000, workmen's savings by £170,000,000 and 800,000 houses had been built.

He was defeated. "Public life is a hard school," he had said two years before. "There is no money in it. Sometimes there is a certain amount of honour, but there are a great many kicks, and you always end in disaster: you are always fired out, and you are liable to be fired out without notice, and there is no pension. But you do have the satisfaction of feeling that you are doing a man's job."<sup>1</sup> He was now far

<sup>1</sup> *Our Inheritance*, 93.

from a rich man. When he had relinquished control of his business for office twenty years before he had been worth half a million: within a year from his defeat at the polls his 180,000 remaining shares in Baldwins had fallen to 1s. 8d., or about a twelfth of their face value.

The decline in fortune was attended by a decline in his credit. In the eighteen months after his defeat at the polls he stood lower in the esteem of his countrymen than at any time since he had assumed the Premiership in 1923. Even his second book of speeches, *Our Inheritance*, with its noble Canadian orations, passed almost unnoticed, and was soon out of print. The talk of getting rid of him, never far below the surface of the London club-world of Tadpole and Taper, now began to swell in volume. He had let the Socialists in with the "Flapper" vote, he had sold the pass with "Safety First," he had failed to re-fashion the House of Lords, put down unrest in India, and given protection to industry. His Tory critics forgot that he had been legislating for a country that was no longer Tory in spirit. They forgot also that many who belonged to no party had voted for them solely because Stanley Baldwin was their leader. The intellectuals were still more bitter. The Empire, private property, and the decencies of private life—all those things that they hated—still remained. Lethargic, blundering Baldwin was responsible.

This was the hour in which impatient men spoke of him as "Bumbling Baldwin"—the stubborn,

stupid obstructionist who stood between the country and the conflicting ideals which they hoped to carry out regardless of time and opposition. The two great lords of the popular Press whom he had offended six years before, combined against him to bring him low. One of them had a policy of his own, which he proclaimed could save the State—a crusade for a system of Empire Free Trade in which he believed with all his ardent nature. The Conservative leader refused to adopt it, for he knew how strong were the forces against him, and he did not wish to tie the opposition to a policy which needlessly would handicap it in the eyes of the electorate. His critics were full of scorn for what they termed his lack of courage and leadership. But he knew the pace of England better than they.

In the autumn of 1930 a concerted effort was made to drive him out of public life. At a party meeting on October 30th a resolution was moved by the hot-heads that a change in the Conservative leadership was necessary in the national interest. Mr. Baldwin, in order to test the real strength of the feeling against him, asked that the voting should be by ballot. Before the decision was taken he told the meeting why, in his opinion, the leader of the party must be left unfettered on the fiscal question. But he added with complete frankness that if the party wanted a new leader, he would go. "In that case, I will walk out with no malice in my heart. I retire

from politics, and I will do nothing to queer the pitch of whomever you may choose as my successor." Then he left them to their decision. By 462 to 116 votes his party decided to retain him. Despite all the vilification of him that was going on in the London clubs and Press two things were standing him in good stead: the affection he had won for himself in the House of Commons, and the trust in which he was held by the rank and file of his own party throughout the country. Whatever some of their leaders might say against him, their loyalty to him never faltered.

Beaten in the party meeting, the Press lords redoubled their campaign in the country. "Bumbling Baldwin" must go. Ceaseless and unscrupulous attacks were made against him and his supporters; independent Conservative candidates, supported by the Press, were put up against official candidates at by-elections, and the full weight of modern publicity was mobilised to howl out of public life a man who loathed publicity. Then, on the 18th March, 1931, he struck back. An Empire Free Trade candidate had been put up by the Press lords to contest the St. George's Division of Westminster, and Mr. Duff Cooper, a young adherent of the Conservative leader, had taken up the challenge as official candidate. Speaking on his behalf at the Queen's Hall, Mr. Baldwin replied to the Press attacks in a style that showed what he could do when for once he resolved to abandon

his rule of restraint and moderation, and take off the gloves.

"I have said little," he began. "It is not worth it. I am going to say something to-day." The papers attacking him were not newspapers in the ordinary acceptance of the term. "They are engines of propaganda for the constantly changing policies, desires, personal wishes, personal likes and dislikes of two men. What are their methods? Their methods are direct falsehood, misrepresentation, half-truths, the alteration of the speaker's meaning by publishing a sentence apart from the context, such as you see in these leaflets handed out outside the doors of this hall; suppression and editorial criticism of speeches which are not reported in the paper. These are methods hated alike by the public and by the whole of the rest of the Press.

"I have used an expression about an 'insolent plutocracy.' These words appeared in the *Daily Mail* of yesterday week: 'These expressions come ill from Mr. Baldwin, since his father left him an immense fortune which, so far as may be learned from his own speeches, has almost disappeared. It is difficult to see how the leader of a party who has lost his own fortune can hope to restore that of anyone else, or of his country.'

"I have one observation to make about that. It is signed, 'Editor, *Daily Mail*.' I have no idea of the name of that gentleman. I would only observe that he is well qualified for the post which he holds. The first part of that statement

is a lie, and the second part of that statement by its implication is untrue. The paragraph itself could only have been written by a cad. I have consulted a very high legal authority, and I am advised that an action for libel would lie. I shall not move in the matter, and for this reason: I should get an apology and heavy damages. The first is of no value, and the second I would not touch with a barge-pole. What the proprietorship of these papers is aiming at is power, and power without responsibility—the prerogative of the harlot throughout the ages.” The electors of St. George’s and the people of the country agreed.

The strength of character which enabled him to defeat the Press barons gave him a victory of another kind, won not against those who claimed to be of his own party, but against his opponents. While the Hotspurs in his ranks had been doing their best to undermine his hold on London and the south, he had been winning new ground for himself and his party in the stubborn north. Here, where opinions are most obstinately and longest held, the wisdom of what he had been striving to achieve at last began to be seen. Till now the northerners had looked on him as a weak, kindly, honest man, not tough enough for the grim task of governing a land faced by ruin. For in the north they knew as never in the south what unemployment and mass bankruptcy meant. But by 1931 they had begun to realise that in Stanley Baldwin the

nation had found a leader worthy even of their own hard metal.

They turned to him for salvation. The men of the Left, on whom they had pinned their hopes, had proved to be of straw : their promises worthless. In Yorkshire and Lancashire, even in coaly Durham, the tide was turning fast against the Socialists. In August, 1931, came the inevitable hour of reckoning—the nemesis of acting as though facts did not exist against which the Conservative leader had warned the nation two years before. It now learnt that reckless, uncalculating expenditure had so impaired British credit in the eyes of the world that its overseas trade and internal currency might collapse within a few days, or even hours.

The people of Britain, as always, were at their best in a crisis. Their spiritual home, like Mr. Baldwin's, was manifestly the last ditch. They faced up to facts with calm, and even with humour. At that moment, for all their earlier failure, their leaders did what was expected of them. They were aided by unhesitating and selfless readiness of the Conservative leader to subordinate himself and his party to the need of the hour. Though few statesmen have ever been presented with a more wonderful electoral opportunity, he put it aside without a thought, and offered to serve under the repentent Socialist Prime Minister. As always, he had only one ideal ; how to create agreement and co-operation where before was discord. "We are taking,"

he said simply, "the only course that it is possible for Englishmen to take."

A few weeks after the National Government had been formed, an appeal was made to the country. There were many, including some who had paid the loudest lip service to democracy, who doubted the wisdom of trusting the people with a decision on which so much depended. Stanley Baldwin did not give such counsel; for all the temporary folly of 1929, his faith in his countrymen had never faltered. He made the issue clear to them, and waited on the event. "Here am I, the leader of the Conservative Party, who took my political life in my hands nine years ago to escape from a Coalition, asking you to support a Government led by a Socialist Prime Minister, and to enter myself under him in another Coalition. I think, if any proof that there is a crisis is necessary, that is sufficient answer. There are greater things than consistency with one's past. There are greater things than loyalty to one's party. I am an Englishman first." By a majority of more than two to one the people of Britain justified his trust in them. On the night of Tuesday, October 27th, 1931, the world learnt that the Socialist Party in the House of Commons had been almost wiped out.

For the next three and a half years, from the winter of 1931 to the summer of 1935, Mr. Baldwin was neither titular head of the Government, nor Leader of the Opposition. His task was twofold, to stand as President of the Council

at Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's right hand, and to carry his party with him in whatever measures the Government might agree upon for the good of the country. Neither task was easy, for those who comprised the administration had hitherto been divided on every question, while a Parliamentary Party with a vast majority is infinitely harder to handle than one whose numerical weakness compels it to unite in the face of the enemy. Mr. Baldwin kept the balance with tact and patience, with a meticulous and almost quixotic chivalry that sometimes enraged his followers, and a strength which impressed them and won their admiration. Never before had he been seen to be so great a man.

The secret of his power over his party lay largely in his hold on the House of Commons. He treated the House as he had treated everyone else—like a gentleman. He was always in his place, and always ready to listen to the views of others. He never forgot, as some of his predecessors had done, that England is a parliamentary country. He flattered the House by his attention, and the obvious honour in which he held its rights and traditions. "The House of Commons," he once said, "is like a fickle woman. If you do not woo her persistently, she will become jealous and get out of hand, but if you pay her constant court she will always be sweet and smiling."

For many of the measures, whether of commission or omission, of the National Govern-

ment during Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's Premiership, Mr. Baldwin cannot be judged. It was the essence of his position that he was called upon to accept much with which he might have had little sympathy had he been leading a purely Conservative administration. Yet in the main outlines of its policy he and the Government of which he was a member were at one. Its initial task was to restore British credit and trade. It pursued the gradual methods suited to the national genius which he had always favoured, and avoided blind adherence to economic catch-words. "I would rather be an opportunist and float," he once said, "than go to the bottom with my principles round my neck." He had the happiness to see the application of that moderate fiscal reform to suit the changed conditions of industry which he had advocated all his life. It served its purpose. Between the formation of the National Government and the time of his final retirement, the figures of unemployment fell by 1,300,000, and those of employment increased by two millions, while the value of British exports rose by over fifty million pounds. As Lord Hirst put it at a dinner to Mr. Baldwin in April, 1937, he helped to re-establish, to the satisfaction of our own people and the admiration of the rest of the world, the economic strength of Britain.

Unquestionably, Mr. Baldwin's greatest work as President of the Council was his leadership of his party during the passage of the Govern-

ment of India Act through Parliament. His achievement was marked by great courage, for he realised that the feeling the measure engendered among a large and influential section of his followers might very well split the party. But he knew also that failure to carry it through would almost unquestionably lose us India. It was not a question of imposing democratic conceptions on India, as his critics seemed to suppose: that had already been done deliberately by past generations who had been, as he put it in a great speech in the House in December, 1931, "at the greatest pains to educate Indians in our political theories and in the study of democratic institutions." The results had been what those who embarked on that educational policy might have foreseen: a new and fast-changing India impregnated with Western ideals. It was impossible to say any longer, "Democracy is for us, and not for you." Nor even had there been truth in the die-hard contention that India could be ultimately coerced against her will to put the clock back, would it have been practicable to try to do so. For Britain was a democracy, and it was inconceivable that a parliamentary majority favourable to a policy of governing India by machine-gun would have survived long enough to see it through. And if it did not, India would be irrevocably lost. However perilous, the only practicable plan was to go forward.

"When God wants a hard thing done," Mr.

Baldwin had said in 1927, when launching the work of the Simon Commission, "he sends for his Englishmen. No harder thing has ever been told to Englishmen than has been told us in this matter," he added. "But we shall do it with courage, with faith, with strength, and with hope." It took eight years of patience, constant set-back, and almost constant danger to the unity of the Conservative Party, to get the Government of India Act on the statute book, but it was achieved. And with it was achieved the only chance of keeping India permanently within the British Empire.

Not only was India kept within the British Empire, but the die-hards were kept within the Conservative Party. Mr. Baldwin's management of the great party whose leadership he so unexpectedly inherited is not the least part of his achievement. When he first entered its ranks before the War it was, however unjustly, a bye-word among the industrial masses for stupidity and narrowness. After the War those industrial masses were enfranchised. To many the only hope for the Conservative Party seemed to lie in the gilded chains that bound it to the chariot wheels of the great Radical demagogue who had won the War. Mr. Baldwin risked more than his own career when he brought down the Coalition. There were some anxious and far-seeing ones who fancied that they heard above the clapping of the men of capital and land at that momentous meeting at the Carlton,

the roar of the mob and the clatter of broken windows in Pall Mall.

But Stanley Baldwin knew his England better than they. Perhaps it was because England had always spelt for him the country habit of his youth—the cherry orchards from Bewdley to Tenbury, the straight blue line of the Malverns, the little shapes of Ankerdine and Berrow Hill and graceful Abberley, and the friendly people who dwelt in their shadow. Their kith and kin in the great industrial cities had no terrors for him. To him they were never the dreaded, terrible working-classes—the nightmare vision of many a rich man—but his fellow countrymen whose virtues and failings he knew so well, because they resembled his own. And because he understood and trusted them he won their confidence: there was almost something intimate in the kind of feeling that existed between him and his many working-class admirers in the party. “Tell me about them, bless them!” he would say when anyone brought him news of the workmen at Wilden or the humble country folk in Worcestershire.

In three out of four successive General Elections the majority of those who voted for the Conservative Party under Mr. Baldwin’s leadership must have been working men. A few years before when Toryism was regarded as the private preserve of the employers, the landowners and the brewers, this would have been unthinkable. Mr. Baldwin made it a reality,—a source

of bitter mortification to the intellectuals who had thought to find themselves the unchallenged leaders of the toiling masses whose real character they so little understood. He did so in the teeth of wholesale electoral bribery and lying propaganda. Both these methods, so fatal to the continental democracies of our age, he resolutely eschewed and proved to the astonishment of Europe that a true democracy could be ruled by other and better means. For electoral bribery he substituted a patient and long term policy, not of promises but of actual legislation, which had no chronological relation to Elections. It benefitted, not a privileged and Conservative class, but the nation as a whole. In this he did what each of the great Tory leaders—Clarendon, Bolingbroke, Pitt and Disraeli—had done before him. He rescued Conservatism from the hands of those who wished to make it the instrument of privilege and recreated it as a great national creed.

For propaganda as an electoral weapon he substituted political education. History may well record that among his greatest achievements was the foundation of Ashridge. The first non-propagandist college of democratic citizenship was endowed in 1928 at the instance of Mr. Baldwin by Urban Broughton in memory of his dead friend, Bonar Law. It was opened by him after his defeat in the summer of 1929, in a place which he had long known and loved—the great house among the Chiltern beeches that had once nursed the youth of Queen Elizabeth and

which during its earlier days as a royal monastery had housed one of the first English Parliaments in its hall.

Ashridge was dedicated by Mr. Baldwin to the "extirpation of ignorancy"—the title which long before one of its monks had given to a treatise on education. Misunderstood at first by the partisan, who erroneously imagined it to be supported by party funds for purely party purposes, and suspected by the general public who imagined that because the Conservative leader was the Chairman of its Governors its aim was political propaganda, Ashridge has established itself by the very integrity of its purpose. To-day 3,000 men and women of all ages, classes and views, drawn from every part of Britain and the Empire, pass through its doors annually. Its influence outside its own walls is growing by leaps and bounds, and to-day shoots of Ashridge are springing up in towns and villages all over the country. It is perhaps the most democratic institution in the world.

Nobody but Mr. Baldwin could ever have conceived such a thing or made its existence possible. It is his favourite political child; and he remains Chairman of its Governors now that he has laid down the Premiership. Long after his work is done his spirit will still go out from that tolerant, hospitable house in the Chilterns to every corner of Britain. Perhaps his ghost may haunt the place, walking down the long avenue of trees on summer evenings as I have

sometimes watched him walk, or speaking quietly from the rostrum under the painted ceiling of the lecture room.

In the autumn of 1935 the Coalition had completed its fourth year of office, and most of the objects for which it had been formed. During that summer men were able to realise the degree to which bitterness and ill-feeling had diminished in the country: the Jubilee celebrations showed Great Britain to be what she had scarcely been in 1922, a united nation. Only a tiny minority of Socialist intellectuals, with their sneer at Jubilee Ballyhoo, stood aloof. The saner view was expressed by Mr. George Lansbury. "Difficult and distressing as the problems of to-day are, we can at least say that the troubles of the past have been overcome with a minimum of violence and disorder, accompanied by a very large measure of goodwill and sympathy." Few men would have grudged a share in that achievement to Stanley Baldwin. "He has taken," wrote the *Spectator*, "bitterness out of political controversy."

In the same year, succeeding Mr. Ramsay MacDonald in June, he became Prime Minister for the third time. The country saw him photographed standing erect at the steps of 10 Downing Street on his return from the Palace, a man, for all his sixty-seven years, with vigour and resolution written in every line of his face and body. Before the year ended he had led his party for the fifth time in a general election.

The chief issue of that election was foreign, not domestic. So far as the latter was concerned, for all the burden of unemployment and the distressed areas, trade was relatively better in Britain than in any other part of the world. Abroad, our situation was not so happy. With our vast Empire, we had interests in every corner of the earth, and no folly could be committed from Kamschatka to Patagonia that did not affect us.<sup>1</sup> But ever since the War, our Governments, interpreting a profound popular conviction, had consistently weakened our powers of defence. They had done so in a genuine belief that other nations would follow our example. That hope had not been fulfilled and by 1935 the continent of Europe, despite all our efforts, was divided into two armed camps.

Mr. Baldwin knew little of the Continent, and he has never made any pretence of understanding foreign internal politics. But he knew a great deal about human nature, and in his attitude towards external affairs he was guided by two profound convictions. The one was that another world war would destroy all that was left of civilisation. The other was that the existence of an unarmed British Empire, with all its priceless treasures and perilous contacts, was a standing temptation to war. It was trying human nature too high. With the new striking power of aerial armaments the blow might fall at an hour's notice. Our Air Force was only fifth among the air forces of the world.

<sup>1</sup> *Our Inheritance*, 308.

For a long time Mr. Baldwin had been aware of this. Others realised it, too, and urged on him the necessity of speedy policy of rearmament. But they were a small minority, and he realised better than any man living how strong were the forces in the country that still believed that peace could be secured by unilateral disarmament. He did not mean to repeat the mistake of 1923. Before he could act, the country had got to be educated.

He began that process of education in 1934 in his speeches on the peril of aerial attack. They first awoke the nation to a realisation of its peril. He continued it at slow but increasing speed after he became Prime Minister. By the autumn of 1935 he judged that the time was ripe to lay the issue before the country. The National Government had another year to run before its term expired, but the danger was too great not to be met at the earliest moment possible and he was too honest a democrat to commit the country to the cost of rearmament until it had had its say: in this great matter, as in every other, the people must be trusted.

Before the election he told the country frankly that he could not be responsible for the conduct of its Government unless he was given power to remedy the deficiencies that had accrued in its defensive services since the War. "The whole world," he told them, "is watching this election, because in this election democracy itself is on trial. We have paid for years lip service to democracy. Are we prepared to make sacrifices

for democracy? . . . It is our duty to show the world that the democracy of this old country, whose people are steeped in the traditions of freedom, can pursue a constant course, that they can make up their minds and be as resolute in will as any dictatorship that ever existed." For the rest, the Government abided by its obligations under the Covenant of the League of Nations, which it could only hope to observe with any effect if the country was adequately armed. Nothing, the Prime Minister said, could be a worse guarantee to the world or a more cruel deception than to say: "We will guarantee peace by arms, and not be ready for it."

Again the Prime Minister's judgment of the country was seen to be right. He had made his decision at the decisive moment, and not an hour too soon or too late. Because it trusted him, British democracy gave him the answer he demanded, and a majority of over two hundred in the new House. It was not so much a party decision as a personal vote of confidence.

By one of those curious ironies of circumstance that have all the while attended his career, Mr. Baldwin's triumph at the polls in November, 1935, was followed by the violent drop in his personal credit caused by the imbroglio of the Hoare-Laval Pact. There was no doubt in the mind of the nation that he had blundered and lost either his control of his colleagues or his grip of the situation; even his good faith was called in question. Yet save for the abortive Pact itself, which arose out of a misunderstanding,

the Government's position throughout the Abyssinian dispute was perfectly consistent. It was prepared to take any part required of it in collective League action; but, whatever might be its disapproval of Italy's violation of her word, it was not going to take any steps that might bring about a European war without the co-operation of all the other members of the League. The Socialists, disregarding the deliberations of the League, preached a fiery crusade against Italy. But for all its grave misunderstanding of the actual issue in Abyssinia, the nation did not want a crusade. Nor was it ready for it. The mandate had been given to rearm, but the rearmament had still to take place. It was going to take several years, and to cost many millions. In the meantime our defences were perilously weak, even at sea, and we could only proceed to war at the gravest risk.

Throughout the Abyssinian dispute, as also during the foreign crises caused by the German occupation of the demilitarised zone and the Spanish Civil War, the Prime Minister remained constant to one theme: that on no account, so long as he was responsible for its policy, would he take any action that might bring about a world war, or involve this country in a war of any kind without a clear mandate from the nation that it wanted war. Because of the very honesty with which he kept to that course amid the shifting sands and changing tides of the European situation, an impatient public which could not see those sands and tides thought him lacking in

purpose. The old clamour against "bumbling Baldwin" was revived : there was talk of forcing him to retire in favour of a younger man. During the summer of 1936 he showed signs of the strain on his health imposed by the triple burden of guiding the country, the House of Commons, and the party. In the autumn he was forced to take a prolonged holiday.

Strained as he was that summer, and dilatory and ill at ease as always when faced by complex issues demanding decision to which his mind had not yet attained, the belief, widespread in club and gossip column, that he was breaking up was quite untrue. An even graver issue than that of peace or war was being forced upon him, of which the public was unaware. He kept his counsel and only showed the struggle that was waging in his mind by occasional signs of nervous exhaustion. Only a man of great reserves of strength could have borne those impending responsibilities with such iron steadiness and silent forbearance. Yet all the while, like some still glacier, his mind was moving towards resolution.

Only once, in June, dealing with the tragedy that had befallen the career of an old colleague, did he show how deeply he was feeling things that summer. Those, committed by the Budget scandal, had said their farewell. After speaking of the political issues involved, he turned to something still deeper :

"Against the finding there is no appeal. Whatever stigma might exist it remains for

all time with no possibility of appeal. They have left the House for the last time, and it is closed to them. The careless and unthinking cruelty of modern publicity has been theirs for weeks. Perhaps the cruellest punishment which the modern civilised world can give has been theirs in full measure.

"There is one other thing, and I think the older I grow the more conscious I am of it. When I see a man put before a tribunal of that nature to answer questions on episodes of his past life where anything may be brought up, I ask myself who of us would escape."

For a moment the wordy warfare of abstract principles and all too concrete careers which is three-quarters of politics was lit by a flash of insight that caused men to pause and left no room for vindication and malice.

Regardless of his critics, he remained at his post for he knew that he had a last great work to do. In December, 1936, he was called upon by his young Sovereign and his country to solve as terrible a dilemma as ever came to a responsible Minister. It is too early to comment on the story of those tragic December days. Three things are certain : that the great Minister who brought his unrivalled judgment and knowledge of popular feeling to the service of his Sovereign and the State was clear and constant in his own mind ; that in the counsel which he gave there was a profound and tender understanding of the human problems involved ; that in the solution, sad as it was, there was nothing but the highest

dignity and restraint in everything that he and his young Sovereign did. When it was over, all the criticism of Mr. Baldwin had vanished as though it had never been. And the cruel rumours, the dividing issue, the bandying words round the throne, had passed almost as by a miracle. In their exorcising a tremendous price had been paid. Yet it was paid with such consummate dignity and with such frankness that all criticism and all rumour so menacing a week before was disarmed. In an age when vulgarity had become standardised the world was suddenly made aware that it was witnessing a tragic drama played by two great gentlemen. In that unique spectacle, political controversy was forgotten, and on the day after the abdication, the noblest and most understanding tribute to the great Tory Prime Minister who had guided the Throne and nation through one of the most awful crises in their history, came from the chief organ of the Labour Opposition.

“They can affirm his praises best  
And have, though overcome, confest  
How good he is, how just  
And fit for highest trust.”

There remained a feeling now universal that he would go down to history as one of the great Prime Ministers of all time.

He had twice, in 1926 and in 1931, saved British democracy. Now he had saved the throne and perhaps the unity of the Empire. His work as a statesman was accomplished. He was at the height of his powers of judgment and mind.

He had been called to his task in God's time and he would lay it down in his own, leaving it to the same hands to shape his future as had shaped his past. It became known that he would retire soon after the Coronation of the new King. As on that thronged tremendous day he drove through the streets with Mrs. Baldwin at his side he was acclaimed with such cheering as no British statesman has ever heard before.

During the final weeks before retirement he spoke much of the ideals of democracy and government by co-operation which he had always held to be the chief contribution of the English race to the world. They were better understood at home than they had ever been before, but there were grave dangers threatening from abroad. "Our Constitution is no ready-made article," he had once said. "It has grown through the centuries, as native to our country and to our people as oak, or ash, or thorn. It has given her people freedom, and it has taught her people the difference between freedom and licence." That was the essential contrast between the idea of democracy as it had been practised in this country, and that other mistaken idea of democracy which had failed elsewhere.

Now that Continental democracy had degenerated into licence, two new idealisms, far removed from the British conception of individual freedom, were contending for mastery. Both, though they as yet had no hold on the general body of the people, were being preached in this country. On the one side, acclaimed as always by

the apostles of class hatred, was Communism. That way led precipitate to tyranny. "The first step is to say that no one deserves protection unless he is a working man, and it is a very easy transition from that to say that no working man deserves protection unless he shouts your slogan." On the other was the authoritarian state, called into being by the fear of Communism, in which an abstraction was set up as something more divine than the human soul. The *credo* of democracy, as Stanley Baldwin saw it, was a belief in the essential dignity of the human soul. "The Christian State," he said in the last speech he made as Prime Minister, "proclaims human personality to be supreme, the servile State denies this. Every compromise with the infinite value of the human soul leads straight back to savagery and the jungle. Expel this truth of our religion, and what follows? The insolence of dominion, and the cruelty of despotism. Denounce religion as the opium of the people, and you swiftly proceed to denounce political liberty and civil liberty as opium. Freedom of speech goes, tolerance follows, and justice is no more." Democracy was quite the most difficult form of government ever devised, because its essence was that those who ruled, however right, could coerce no man, but must first obtain for every measure the willing consent of a whole people. That was why under a democracy all reform must be gradual and there could be no short cuts. Its pace was slower than that of a dictatorship. But it was ultimately stronger, because when fair

decision was obtained, it was a spiritually unanimous decision. And it was more lasting, because it educated the people to stand on their own feet. A dictatorship was like a beech tree : very fine to look at, but nothing grew underneath it.

On May 6th Mr. Baldwin spoke again in the House of Commons, urging moderation and wisdom in the negotiations that were taking place to avert a strike in the coalfields. The speech made a profound impression on all who heard it, not least on the Labour members, who had come to trust and honour him almost as much as his own devoted followers. A fortnight later he made his farewell speech as Prime Minister in the Albert Hall at an Empire Rally of Youth. He spoke of the importance of every individual citizen taking some part in the dry-as-dust business in the government of his country. "When I talk of your country, I mean all its activities—everything it comprehends—the well-being and contentment of its people, their education, their religion, its professions, its business, its public affairs, the government of village or town or county, the progress of the country, and their Parliament. All that is inevitably committed to you, whether you realise it or desire it, or not. As the whole is the sum of its parts, and as you are a part, you are bound to have some influence, good or bad. Wherever you live, you are bound to have some effect for good or for evil on your neighbourhood and on your country. Do your best by it for your

own sake, and for the sake of your children."

Then he said his last word as leader of the nation. "We are passing. You are the governors of the future. We are passing on to you the duty of guarding and safeguarding what is worthy and worth while in our past, our heritage, and our tradition, our honour, and all our hopes. The beauty of the countryside is yours: the green fields and the trees and the wild flowers; the rivers, the moors, the prairies, and the hills; the treasures of the ages in literature and art. All these are yours. All this accumulated wealth, material and moral, is being, and will be, transferred to your account that you may enjoy it. Certainly enjoy it, but also hold it, and, I hope, enhance its value to hand it on.

"You are trustees; trustees in every sense of that noble word. What is coming to you is a trust, and not merely a benefit which devolves upon you, a trust you hold for future generations. Unless you rise to the trust there will be little benefit for you or your children to enjoy.

"It will be for you to protect democracy in whatever part of the Empire you may live. It must be defended from without, and equally, it may have to be defended from within. And it may well be that you will have to save democracy from itself." It was just that which he had given his whole life to doing.

